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- Latest news from all 32 finalists

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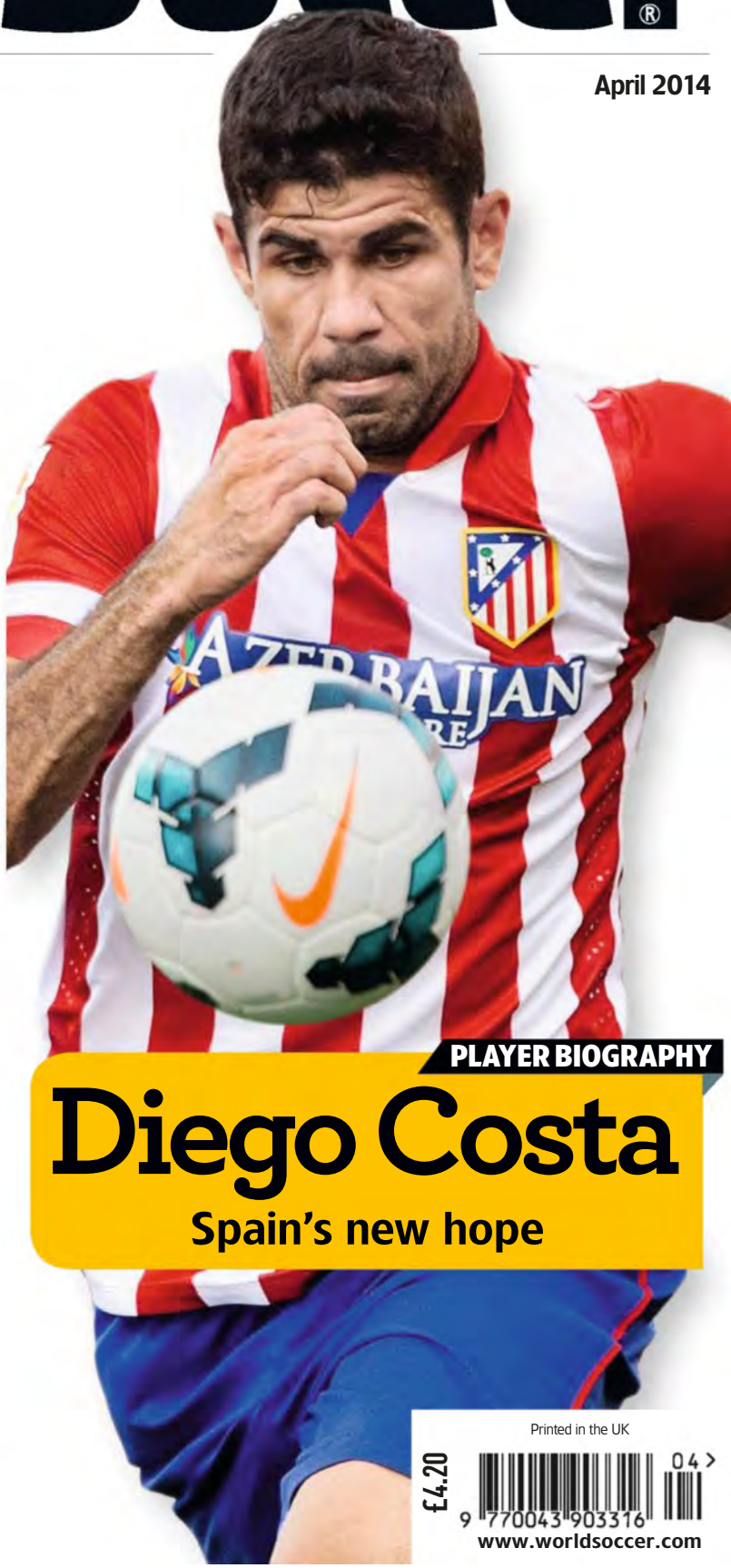

PLAYER BIOGRAPHY

Diego Costa

Spain's new hope

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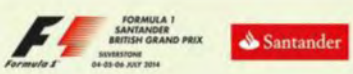

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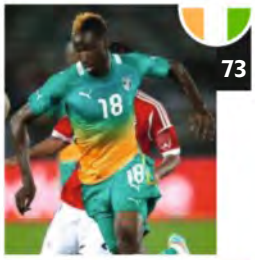

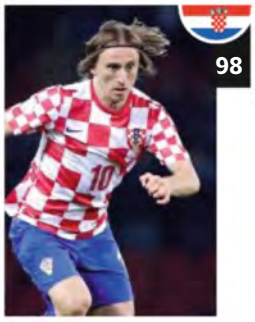

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In Pictures

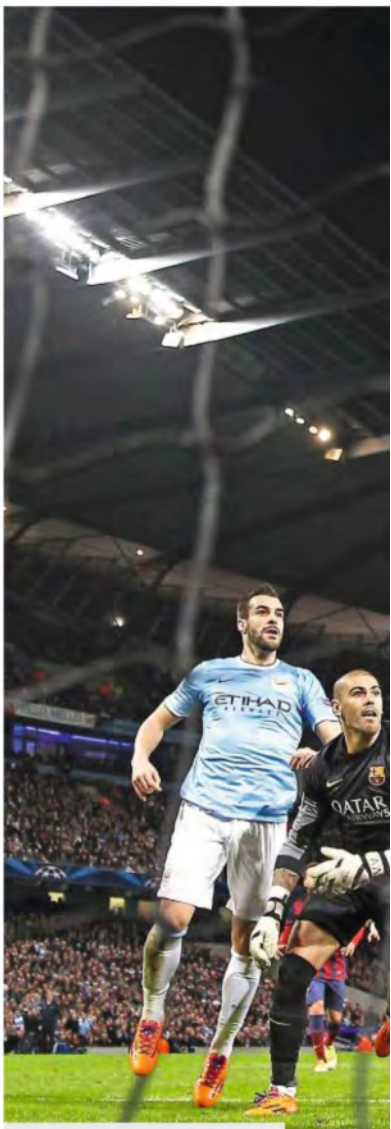
The global game caught on camera

ITALY...Carlos Tevez celebrates his winning goal against Torino in the *Derby della Mole*

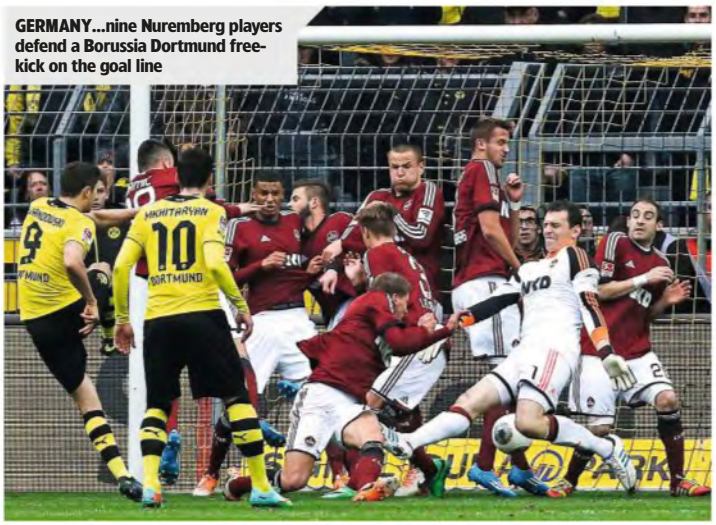
BELGIUM...Anzhi forward Oleksandr Aliyev celebrates his goal against Genk in the Europa League

IRAN...young Esteghlal fans cheer on their team in the AFC Champions League

SOUTH AFRICA...a small South African boy who ran onto the pitch is given star treatment by Brazil's players



ENGLAND...Manchester City's Fernandinho goes in with a header as Barcelona defend rigorously in their Champions League clash



GERMANY...nine Nuremberg players defend a Borussia Dortmund free-kick on the goal line

SPAIN...Villarreal's Jonathan Pereira tries to avoid a smoke bomb thrown on the pitch in the game against Celta Vigo

PICTURES OF THE MONTH QR CODE

To see more of the best photos from the month, scan the QR code using any free QR reader that can be downloaded to your smartphone. You can also see the images by logging on to http://bit.ly/NQK2Gv

FROM THE EDITOR

Not long to go now. The 2014 World Cup is only a matter of weeks away and for most of the 32 finalists the recent friendlies were a last chance to try out new players before the provisional squads of 30 are named in May. And while it may seem as if it will be too late for newcomers to force their way into the final squads, World Cup history is full of players – Geoff Hurst, Toto Schillaci, Giuseppe Bergomi – who starred at the finals despite only making their international debuts in the weeks leading up to the tournament.

> World Cup history is full of players who starred at the finals despite only making their debuts in the weeks prior to the tournament

Admittedly, our cover star Diego Costa (page 58) is a curious case. But having finally played his first game for Spain after months of deliberation and delay, he could be a star of Brazil 2014.

Irrespective of what happens at the World Cup, Costa will be one of the most talked about players of the summer because Atletico Madrid will struggle to resist large offers for him in a transfer market that will feature several big names (see page 46).

Next month our World Cup coverage cranks up another gear as we interview all 32 World Cup coaches. As always, it will also be available in digital format (right). See you then.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

1. The death of Tom Finney, Mario Coluna and Richard Moller Nielsen ..... pages 13, 14 and 20
2. Players' strike threatened in Brazil ..... page 34
3. Hamburg in trouble in the Bundesliga ..... page 33
4. Diego Costa makes his debut for Spain ..... page 58
5. Curitiba stadium earns FIFA reprieve ..... page 24
6. The 19th season of MLS kicks off ..... page 30
7. Last round of international friendlies involving all 32 finalists page 24
8. The Asian Cup finalists settled ..... page 41
9. Carles Puyol announces his retirement ..... page 37
10. The International FA Board met in Zurich ..... page 17

SWITZERLAND

Getting shirty...PSV's Georginio Wijnaldum will no longer be able to do this

IFAB votes to ban player shirt slogans

The International FA Board, meeting in Zurich, has voted to ban celebrating players lifting up their shirts to reveal slogans or messages on an undergarment.

"From now on, there can be no slogan or image whatsoever on undergarments – even good-natured ones," said FIFA secretary general Jerome Valcke.

IFAB also rejected a proposal from UEFA to review the so-called "triple punishment", when a player is sent off, concedes a penalty and is later suspended for stopping a goalscoring opportunity.

SPAIN

Barcelona make tax payment to avoid costly court case

Barcelona have made a payment of €13.5million to Spain's tax authorities while denying any fiscal "irregularities" in its purchase of Neymar, which is now under investigation by a court.

Barcelona made the "voluntary" payment just four days after a judge at Spain's National Court in Madrid filed preliminary charges against the fan-owned club for alleged tax fraud in the Neymar deal.

Last month, *World Soccer* reported how €38m of "secret" payments were made to "companies" acting on behalf of Neymar and his father/adviser.

Acting president...Josep Maria Bartomeu

"For me, Ozil is not one for big games. The way he reacts after losing out in a challenge or under-hits a pass, is simply not acceptable"

Former Germany international midfielder Uwe Bein leaps into the Mesut Ozil debate

ROMANIA

Popescu jailed in transfer scandal

Disgraced...ex-Barcelona star Popescu

Ex-international Gheorghe Popescu was one of a number of leading figures in Romanian football who have been jailed for their part in a corruption scandal.

Popescu, who had been the favourite to be elected as the new president of the Romanian FA, was sentenced to three years, one month and 10 days in jail after being found guilty of money laundering and tax evasion in relation to player transfers between 1999 and 2005.

Others who were sentenced included the former owners of Dinamo Bucharest, Rapid Bucharest and Otelul Galati – Cristian Borcea, George Copos and Mihai Stoica – plus agent Ioan Becali and Victor Becali. All decisions were considered final as they were handed down by the Bucharest Court of Appeal.

Popescu, who won the 1997 European Cup-winners Cup with Barcelona and league titles in Romania, Turkey and Holland and was Romanian player of the year five times, was taken from the court to a Bucharest prison.

Popescu and his fellow accused were found guilty of not declaring the whole amount of transfers of 12 players from their respective clubs to foreign teams from 1999-2005.

Among the transfers involved in the scandal were those of international trio Nicolae Mitea, transferred from Dinamo Bucharest to Dutch giants Ajax, Cosmin Contra from Dinamo to Spanish outfit Alaves and Ionel Ganea from Gloria Bistrita to Bundesliga side Stuttgart.

HEROES & VILLAINS

MILOS JOJIC

Borussia Dortmund's new signing from Partizan Belgrade scored within 17 seconds of appearing as a substitute in the 4-0 victory over Eintracht Frankfurt to record the fastest-ever goal by a Bundesliga debutant.

Quickest debutant...Jojic celebrates

MARKUS ROSENBERG

The Swedish striker left the entire contents of his home in England to charity after moving back home to join Malmo from West Bromwich Albion.

MARCIN ROBAK

The striker scored five goals in 67 minutes as Pogon Szczecin beat Lech Poznan 5-1 in the Polish top flight. The 31-year-old is currently the Polish Ekstraklasa's leading scorer this season.

HIRVING LOZANO

The Pachuca teenager came off the bench in the 85th minute to make his debut for the Mexican club, against America, and scored the winner five minutes later to give his side an unexpected 1-0 win at the Azteca stadium.

Timely intervention...Lozano (centre)

In trouble...Newcastle boss Pardew (left)

ALAN PARDEW

The Newcastle United manager was fined £100,000 for head-butting Hull City midfielder David Meyler in a touchline altercation between the pair.

JUAN CUADRADO

The Fiorentina winger turned from hero to villain in the Italian Cup semi-final against Udinese. After scoring the second goal in Fiorentina's 3-0 second-leg win, he was shown a yellow card in added time that proved costly. He had been booked in an earlier round against Siena in January and a second yellow in the competition means he will miss the final against Napoli in May.

Out of Final...Cuadrado

LUKASZ SAPELA

The goalkeeper of Ravan Baku, who are bottom of the league in Azerbaijan, celebrated saving a penalty at home to Qabala by repeatedly making an "up yours" gesture to his own club's supporters. His celebrations turned to commiserations when the referee then promptly sent him off for inflammatory behaviour.

NICOLAS ANELKA

The West Bromwich Albion forward was banned for five games and fined £80,000 for making a "quenelle" gesture after scoring against West Ham United in December. The infalmatory salute is considered by many to be anti-Semitic.

"Thank you to my inspiration... Diego Armando Maradona"

The Great Beauty **director Paolo Sorrentino thanks an unlikely source after winning the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film**

GOALS we'd like to see again

To see video footage of these goals, and many more that we have selected, scan the QR code using any free QR reader that can be downloaded to your smartphone. You can also see the videos by logging on to bit.ly/1jOy9w2

1 ROGELIO CHAVEZ
Cruz Azul v Queretaro
A spectacular dipping volley from the halfway line after his own throw-in wasn't cleared properly.

2 LAZAR MARKOVIC
Benfica v Vitoria Guimaraes
Well-worked move rounded off with a dink over the advancing keeper before the ball is placed in an empty net.

3 YAYA TOURE
Manchester City v Sunderland
Following a patient build-up, the Ivorian clips a 35-yard shot that curls into the top corner in the League Cup Final.

4 TOMAS ROSICKY
Arsenal v Sunderland
Rosicky exchanges passes with three of his team-mates as he threads his way through the Sunderland defence before lifting the ball over goalkeeper Vito Mannone.

5 MARIO BALOTELLI
Milan v Bologna
Hits a dipping right-foot shot from 40-yards out into the top corner.

6 JONATHAN SORIANO
Salzburg v Ajax
Beckham-esque shot from the halfway line during the Europa League tie in Amsterdam.

WINNERS

CANNES
The team from the fourth tier, who knocked Saint-Etienne out of the French Cup in the previous round, beat Montpellier 1-0 to progress to the quarter-finals.

RIO AVE
Reached their first Portuguese League Cup Final for 30 years after beating Braga 2-1 in the semi-finals.

AL AHLY
Egypt's CAF Super Cup winners overtook Milan as the club with the most internationally recognised titles, taking their tally to 19.

LOSERS

HAMBURG
Set a club record of seven Bundesliga defeats in a row when they lost away to Eintracht Braunschweig.

PORTO
A 1-0 loss to Estoril was the Portuguese side's first defeat on home soil in the league since October 2008, ending an unbeaten run of 81 games.

AJAX
The four-times European champions equalled their worst continental defeat with a 6-1 aggregate loss to Salzburg in the Europa League.

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"The problem with Chelsea is I lack a goalscorer. I have Eto'o but he is 32 years old, maybe 35, who knows"

Jose Mourinho is caught off camera lamenting Chelsea's striking options

REPORTS we couldn't make up

1 When former World Cup winner Rivaldo, now player/president of Sao Paulo club Mogi Mirim, replaced Magrao in the second half of his club's state championship match at home to XV de Piracicaba, he lined up for the first time with his son Rivaldo Jnr, otherwise known as Rivaldinho.

To add to the occasion for the 41-year-old, and his 18-year-old son, the 1-1 draw was played in the Estadio Romildo Ferreira – the stadium that is named after Rivaldo's father and Rivaldinho's grandfather, who also played for the club.

2 Players in the professional women's football league in Iran are to be subjected to compulsory gender tests after several top players, including four from the national team, were said to be either men who had not completed sex change ops or women who were suffering from sexual development disorders.

Clubs will no longer be able to sign players unless they have passed a gender test. Any players who are unable to prove that they are female will be barred from playing "until they underwent medical treatment", according to Ahmad Hashemian, who is the head of the Iranian football federation's medical committee.

Despite contravening Sharia Law, sex changes are permitted in Iran under a fatwa issued by the late Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979.

Girls play...Iran women's team

3 The wheels have come off, quite literally, for Borussia Dortmund striker Robert Lewandowski.

While he is still finding the back of the net with regular ease for his club side, the wheels of his Porsche Cayenne GTS were stolen – setting him back an estimated €2,500 for a new set – two days after he scored twice in the 5-1 win away to Werder Bremen.

It has yet to be confirmed whether the Bayern Munich-bound Lewandowski suffered at the hands of general thieves, Werder Bremen supporters or his own fans who are aggrieved that he is set to follow the same path from Dortmund to Munich as Mario Gotze.

4 Wadi al-Nees, who are from a small village south of Bethlehem, have been crowned champions of Palestine's West Bank League, winning the title with a lead of seven points with one game still left to play.

The team is made up of six sons, three grandsons and five other family relatives of farmer Yousef Abu Hammad, who is 75 years old and has produced 12 sons who have all gone on to play for the local team, including the current crop.

His six eldest sons used to form the core of the team. Now it is the six younger sons, including captain Samih, midfielders Hassan and Khader, and defenders Mohammed and Ghaleb who make up the spine of the championship-winning side.

Proud...Abu Hammad (left) and family members

5 Former Arsenal hero Dennis Bergkamp has joined past team-mates Thierry Henry and Tony Adams, as well as legendary manager from the 1920's Herbert Chapman, in having his own statue unveiled outside the club's Emirates Stadium.

The artwork, in bronze, shows the Dutchman controlling the ball in mid-air, reminiscent of one his goals for the Gunners away to Leicester in 1997, and a year later for Holland against Argentina in the World Cup.

6 Spare a thought for teenage goalkeeper Josh Dijkstra. The 16-year-old let in 10 goals on his debut for Southern United against Auckland City in the New Zealand Premiership in February.

Family affair...Rivaldo (right) and his teenage son Rivaldinho

Tribute...the bronze statue of Bergkamp outside Arsenal's ground

"He was and will always be a football genius, who magnified football and projected Sport Lisboa e Benfica to a global dimension"

Benfica statement on the passing of Mario Coluna

Playmaker, leader, captain for Benfica and Portugal

MARIO COLUNA
(1935–2014)

Midfielders tend to be ill-served by the current fashion for defining a player's value more through statistics than perception. Hence some of the finest creative players to grace the game are left in the shadows of history. But where would Pele have been without Didi? Puskas without Bozsik? Bastin without James? And Eusebio without Coluna?

Mario Esteves Coluna, who died aged 78 in Maputo, Mozambique, was as important to Benfica's triumphs in the early 1960s as his old attacking partner, who himself was mourned by world football less than two months ago.

Coluna was the playmaker who commanded the game and created many openings. He was also the first black man to wear the captain's armband for a leading European team.

Coluna was born on August 6, 1935, in Inhaca, Mozambique – then a Portuguese overseas territory – to a Portuguese mother and Mozambican father. He grew up in a football-mad neighbourhood which also provided Portugal with outstanding internationals in Vicente and Matateu. Yet his initial ambition was merely practical: to become a car mechanic.

Football was not even his first sport – that was boxing. He then tried athletics and broke Mozambique's national high-jump record. He was 15 before he began playing football regularly, with Desportivo Lourenco Marques, where his father had been a founder member.

The club was also Benfica's main local nursery so, despite rival offers from Porto and Sporting Lisbon, it was the one from Lisbon's "Eagles" that he accepted. Years later his daughter said: "My grandfather told him: 'If you choose Sporting then I will have you prohibited from leaving the country.'"

Initially Coluna was a centre-forward, but Benfica already had a fine front man in Jose Aguas, so he was converted into a strike partner by Brazilian coach Otto Gloria and ended his debut season in 1954-55 with 17 goals.

Fronting up...Coluna (right) and Lev Yashin lead out Portugal and the Soviet Union for the 1966 World Cup third-place match

It was Gloria's successor, Hungarian Bela Guttman, who switched him to inside-forward. Later, he became Benfica's midfield general under Chilean Fernando Riera. In all, he scored 127 goals in 525 competitive appearances, winning 10 Portuguese titles, six national cups and the European Cup in 1961 and 1962. He was capped 57 times by his country, scoring eight goals.

Important goals

Of all Coluna's goals, none was more important than his 30-yard strike in the 1961 European Cup Final in Berne, when Benfica beat odds-on favourites Barcelona 3-2 – and he played almost all the match with a broken nose.

The following year Coluna scored again in the 5-3 win over Real Madrid in the Final in Amsterdam. Benfica also reached the Final for a third successive season, at Wembley, in 1963. However, Coluna broke a foot in a challenge from Milan's Gino Pivatelli and was a passenger for the rest of the game in the days before substitutes. Benfica lost 2-1.

Coluna returned to Wembley three years later as captain of Portugal who finished third in the 1966 World Cup under his old Benfica boss Gloria. Coluna believed he managed to save Gloria from being sent off during the 2-1 semi-final defeat by England at Wembley. He recalled: "The referee whistled for a foul against us and Gloria ran to the touchline. I saw what was happening and started to run too.

"Just when the referee was raising his arm to send Gloria off, I caught up with him and said, in my poor English: 'Mr Referee, I'm the captain of my team. I'm so sorry about my coach.' So he was able to go back to the bench."

He was honoured the following year by being named captain of a world select XI for a tribute match for veteran Spanish goalkeeper Ricardo Zamora, but then tasted a third defeat as a captain at Wembley, in the 1968 European Cup Final against Manchester United .

Nicknamed "*Monstro Sagrado*" (holy monster) by Benfica fans, Coluna left in 1970 to spend a season in France with Lyon before returning to Portugal to end his career at Estrela Portalegre.

After Mozambique became independent in 1975, Coluna served as football federation president and then sports minister from 1994 to 1999.

Benfica president Luis Filipe Vieira said: "Mario Coluna won the respect of all those of us who had the privilege of seeing him play...and, as a man, the respect of all those, later on, who were not so fortunate."

Keir Radnedge

Mario Coluna timeline

1935	**born in Mozambique**
1955	**made first of his 57 appearances for Portugal**
1962	**won European Cup for a second time with Benfica**
1966	**finished in third place at the World Cup**
1969	**won last of his 10 Portuguese league titles with Benfica**
1994	**appointed Mozambique's minister of sport**
2014	**died in Mozambique**

"He was perhaps the greatest coach we ever had in Danish football. It was a great honour to play under him"

John Jensen (left), who scored the opening goal in the Euro '92 Final, pays tribute to Richard Moller Nielsen

OBITUARIES

The coach behind a footballing fairy tale

RICHARD MOLLER NIELSEN
(1937–2014)

Richard Moller Nielsen, who died on February 13 at the age of 76, was the man who inspired the finest fairy-tale triumph in the history of international football. His Denmark team had failed to qualify for the 1992 European Championship, but when group winners Yugoslavia were excluded from the tournament at the last minute on political grounds, Moller Nielsen's men were called back from their holiday beaches to fashion the most unlikely of victories.

He had been a coach for 30 years by then, having begun at the age of 25 after injury cut short a playing career for his home-town club, Odense, that brought two caps as a rugged defender for Denmark. There were 14 years in charge of Odense, some of which he combined with his work as coach of the national under-21 side, through which many of the "Danish Dynamite" team – such as Soren Lerby and Preben Elkjaer – emerged.

Villain to hero...Moller Nielsen turned the Danes into European champions

Embarrassment

His time as national boss started in 1990 after a major embarrassment for Denmark when they announced the appointment of German coach Horst Wohlers as a replacement for Sepp Piontek before matters had been settled with his club side, Bayer Uerdingen. The deal fell through and the Danish FA had to turn to Moller Nielsen instead.

There was an initial honeymoon period for the man known affectionately in Danish football as "Ricardo", but that ended swiftly with several defeats and a fallout with superstar Michael Laudrup. Almost the entire media in Denmark were campaigning for Moller Nielsen to be sacked when the late entry to Euro 92 occurred. Most of the players were on holiday, with captain Lars Olsen hearing the news while driving with his family to Turkey.

Moller Nielsen came into his element at the tournament. He was a strong personality who was able to galvanise his players into action swiftly. He had an immense self-assurance that wasn't dented by the dispute with the elder Laudrup, and an unshakeable belief in the squad he selected. It contained the younger Laudrup brother, Brian, quicksilver striker Flemming Povlsen, and tireless midfielders Kim Vilfort and John Jensen. Best of all, it had Peter Schmeichel in goal.

Without pressure, but also without preparation, Denmark won through from a tough group of England, France and hosts Sweden. In the semi-finals they played magnificently against reigning champions Holland, drawing 2-2 and then winning the penalty shoot-out. By now, Moller Nielsen had transformed from villain to national hero. His eclectic selections, like burly midfielder Henrik Larsen who scored three goals, had paid handsome dividends.

Piontek's team had won many hearts but they never delivered any silverware and the team of '92 were average players by comparison. Yet they overcame Germany 2-0 in the Final with all of Europe cheering them on. Schmeichel made several wonderful saves, while the unsung Jensen and Vilfort grabbed the goals.

Moller Nielsen was known as a real gentleman of sport, a measured man who lived virtually all his life in the provincial town where he had been born and where he was to die. He was a deeply proud character of great mental strength who would confront his critics head-on rather than whisper in the background. It didn't always endear him to people, but respect was something he never lacked.

When he died, Schmeichel led the tributes for "an inspiration, my teacher and my friend".

Moller Nielsen was voted *World Soccer*'s manager of the year for 1992, emulating his predecessor Piontek, and he also led Denmark to success in the 1995 Confederations Cup, where they beat Argentina 2-0 in the Final.

After stepping down at the end of Euro 96 he had spells with Finland and Israel, but nothing could ever hope to match the ultimate fairy tale of football.

Jim Holden

Moller Nielsen timeline

1937	**born in Odense, Denmark**
1959	**won first of two international caps**
1982	**led Odense to a second Danish league title**
1990	**appointed coach of Denmark**
1992	**won European Championship and named *World Soccer's* World Manager of the Year**
1995	**won the Confederations Cup**
1996	**left role as coach of Denmark**
2014	**died in Odense**

OBITUARIES

PHILIPPE MAHUT
(1956–2014)
Defender who won nine caps for France and played in the 3–2 defeat by Poland in the 1982 World Cup third-place play-off.

World Cup play-off...Mahut

CARLOS BORGES
(1932–2014)
Scored the first goal in the Libertadores Cup, for Penarol against Jorge Wilstermann in 1960, he won 35 caps for Uruguay and scored 10 goals, including a hat-trick against Scotland in the 1954 World Cup.

World Cup hat-trick...Borges

DEZSO NOVAK
(1939–2014)
A defender with Ferencvaros, he represented Hungary at the 1964 European Nations Cup and three Olympic Games, winning gold medals in 1964 and 1968, and a bronze in 1960. He later had three spells as coach of his former club.

TOM FINNEY
(1922–1914)
• *For Brian Glanville's tribute to Tom Finney, see page 20*

David CONN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

Football can afford a safe return to terracing

If he were still with us today, it would be fascinating to hear the thoughts of Lord Justice Taylor, author of the two landmark reports following the Hillsborough disaster, approaching 25 years ago. He would, surely, be aghast that the families of the 96 who died in the crush on the foul Leppings Lane terraces at Sheffield Wednesday's Hillsborough ground had to fight so long after his vindication of their loved ones for a new inquest starting this spring.

He would, however, be immensely gratified to have seen the vast improvements in football stadium quality and safety since his appalled tour of the "general malaise or blight over the game" – which nevertheless, as he noted in his final report in January 1990, "still commands massive public support".

Yet how might Taylor have felt about the fact that, almost 25 years later, a substantial number of fans have never reconciled themselves to his recommendation that grounds should be all-seater, and that a campaign to overturn it is gaining strength. The argument, hauled smartly from the fringes of taboo into mainstream debate by the Football Supporters Federation (FSF), received its most significant breakthrough in February.

A majority of Football League clubs voted to lobby the government for standing to be allowed in the Championship and to license the facilities advanced by the FSF: "rail seats". These are barriers incorporating seats which can be flipped up to allow standing, in rows intended to be just one fan deep, so making a crush impossible.

The previous sports minister, Hugh Robertson, had spelled out the risk for any politician to approve standing, saying "his head would be on a stick" were there any safety incidents in which standing could have been a factor.

Yet the clubs' intervention, asking to accommodate their own supporters in standing areas, takes the issue farther out of the Hillsborough context and calls for a straightforward consideration of the issue. The Football League clubs – and Aston Villa, whose chief executive Paul Faulkner is leading a growing number of Premier League clubs in favour – will tell you the fans repeatedly tell them they want to stand. And it is a glaring truth that many fans do stand now in areas designated as compulsory all-seating.

Taylor's interim report, four months after the 1989 disaster, is such a monument to astute judgement it seems disrespectful even to ask questions about his final report with the benefit of hindsight. Yet it does highlight a few points in need of review.

On his decision to recommend all-seater stadiums for the avoidance of injury and control of misbehaviour, Taylor wrote: "I am satisfied...spectators will become accustomed and educated to sitting. The evidence I have received shows that, more recently, where seating has been installed the fans have come to accept and like it." That has not panned out quite as he predicted.

> A substantial number of fans have never been reconciled to Taylor's recommendation grounds should be all seater

The Football Supporters Association, one of the FSF's two forerunners, had objected, arguing standing did not cause Hillsborough, fans cherished the standing culture and prices would rise if seating were made compulsory. The Football Association also argued against all-seater stadiums, broadly on the same principles.

Taylor, famously, paid sadly superficial attention to the question of cost, merely assuming: "It should be possible to plan a price structure which suits the cheapest seats to the pockets of those presently paying to stand."

Taylor got many things right – he wanted the best for football – but underestimated the affinity for standing and clubs' eagerness to exploit fans' loyalty and make money.

Should the clubs succeed over standing, they owe a clear duty to make football more affordable. They accepted public money to help make grounds all-seater, but ignored what Taylor said about keeping football as the people's game. WS

"We've been brainwashed by the [idea that] the Premier League is the best league in the world. Nonsense. It's the best brand"

Roy Keane tries to explain English defeats in the Champions League

15 MATCHES THAT MATTERED

Recent crunch games from around the globe

LIVERPOOL 5
ARSENAL 1
Four goals in a stunning opening 20 minutes put Liverpool back in the Premier League title race and inflicted a first defeat on Arsenal at Anfield since 2007.

MONACO 1
PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN 1
The hosts came from behind to grab a point as the top two in Ligue 1 met, with Laurent Blanc's PSG maintaining their five-point cushion in first place.

BENFICA 2
SPORTING LISBON 0
Played two days after the original game was cancelled minutes before kick-off due to high winds, the league leaders beat their city rivals to extend their lead.

CANNES 1
MONTPELLIER 0 (aet)
Having already beaten Saint-Etienne, fourth-tier amateurs Cannes collected another Ligue 1 scalp as they reached the quarter-finals of the French Cup.

AJAX 0
SALZBURG 3
The Austrians stunned Ajax with three first-half goals to virtually end the Dutch club's hopes of Europa League progress before the second leg.

AL AHLY 3
CS SFAXIEN 2
The CAF Champions League holders won a record-extending sixth African Super Cup, beating the Confederation Cup winners from Tunisia in Cairo.

GUANGZHOU EVERGRANDE 4
MELBOURNE VICTORY 2
Two debut goals from Alessandro Diamanti got his new Chinese club off to a winning start in their AFC Champions League defence as they came from 2-0 down.

SCHALKE 1
REAL MADRID 6
The Spanish side all but ensured their place in the quarter-finals of the Champions League with this commanding victory in their away leg.

LUDOGORETS 3
LAZIO 3
The Bulgarians twice came from behind on home soil and secured a 4-3 aggregate Europa League win with a goal in the 88th minute from Juninho Quixada.

FEYENOORD 1
AJAX 2
Frank De Boer's side came from behind to win the 176th *Klassieker* and move eight points clear of second-placed Twente in the Eredivisie.

MANCHESTER CITY 3
SUNDERLAND 1
Goals from Yaya Toure, Samir Nasri and Jesus Navas cancelled out Fabio Borini's opener at Wembley Stadium in the League Cup Final.

ATLETICO MADRID 2
REAL MADRID 2
Cristiano Ronaldo scored a late equaliser for the visitors against their city rivals at the Vicente Calderon to maintain their place at the top of La Liga.

Paul GARDNER

THE WORLDWIDE VIEW

NAPOLI 3
ROMA 0
Goals from Jose Callejon, Gonzalo Higuain and Jorginho overturned a 3-2 first-leg loss to put Napoli in the Italian Cup Final, where they will face Fiorentina.

EINTRACHT FRANKFURT 3
PORTO 3
Despite trailing 2-0 after 52 minutes, Porto battled back to equalise through substitute Nabil Ghilas and reached the Europa League round of 16 on away goals.

OLYMPIAKOS 0
PANATHINAIKOS 3
Pana endured objects thrown from the crowd to end the 27-game unbeaten league run of Olympiakos, whose Michael Olaitan collapsed unexpectedly during the game.

IFAB right on cynical fouls...but why not hand out even harsher penalties?

So, the International Football Association Board (IFAB) can, on occasion, manage to think straight. Its recent rejection of a request from UEFA – read Michel Platini – that the so-called "triple-punishment" rule for denying an obvious goalscoring opportunity (DOGSO) be watered down was exactly the right response.

At the media conference following the meeting, Stewart Regan of the Scottish FA reminded everyone that IFAB had introduced the rule in the first place "because there were cynical tackles" by defenders. The feeling was that UEFA's proposal would re-open the door to those tackles. Regan said: "Particularly goalkeepers, if they are the last person between the goal and the player, they know they can't get sent off, they are simply going to be taking out the attacker."

Alex Horne, general secretary of the English FA, also defended the decision, adding "this is not to say we don't understand the issues that are facing football". But that is spectacularly incorrect because getting the triple-punishment decision right is a rare example of IFAB making a positive decision on something that directly affects how the game is played on the field.

Far more often it is precisely a failure to understand – perhaps that's better said as failure to tackle – the issues facing football that characterise IFAB's work.

When Regan talks of "cynical tackles" and a commendable wish to banish them, why is his – and IFAB's – vision so shortsightedly linked only to DOGSO? That offence is not an every-game occurrence – it may not even happen once in every 10 games – yet there are cynical tackles to be seen in every game.

I'm referring to tactical fouls. My guesstimate is that these occur at a minimum of two or three in each game, far more frequently than DOGSO. And, it seems, they are acceptable. The player who committed the foul – it was probably not a violent one – turns away, casually accepts the yellow card, should it be shown, and the clever dicks in the TV booth talk admiringly of him having "taken one for the team".

What the foul has done is to squelch – illegally – an opponent's attack before it can get going. The rules – IFAB's own rules – say quite clearly that the referee *must* give a yellow card to a player committing "a foul for the tactical purpose of interfering with or breaking up a promising attack".

But this is one of the great blind spots in the game. Those yellows are far too frequently not given, so cynical tackling flourishes, is even praised, and thus the game suffers.

> If the offender is to be praised for "taking one for the team", let's respond by holding the team responsible

Why is it that IFAB – if it "understands the issues that are facing football" – does not take action to make sure that this rule is strictly enforced, or even to threaten harsher punishment? If the offender is to be praised for "taking one for the team", let's respond by holding the team responsible: the first tactical foul gets the yellow, but the player committing the second tactical foul, whoever commits it, gets a red. For the team, of course.

Why does IFAB not take the initiative here? The opportunity for change exists under its new constitution. It now has two panels of experts, so surely IFAB can originate action and ask the panels to pass judgment on cases like this, where the rules themselves, or the application of them, are having a clearly deleterious effect on the game.

Somehow, I doubt that will happen. Because despite the talk of IFAB becoming more pro-active, its long history as a torpid committee that only reacts to what others put before them, hangs heavy around its neck. Anyway, a group of part-timers that meets only twice a year is not going to transmogrify itself into the dynamic force needed to ensure the game's integrity. WS

"I've never heard Pep utter a single arrogant word. That really pleases me and that struck me in his time at Barcelona. Our popularity has never been so high before. That's also down to Pep"

Bayern Munich president Karl-Heinz Rummenigge on coach Pep Guardiola

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

IN

Ground breaking...Magath

EUROPE

FELIX MAGATH became the first German to manage in the Premier League when he took over at Fulham from Rene Meulensteen, who was in charge for just 75 days.

MIRKO SLOMKA replaced Bert Van Marwijk as coach of struggling Hamburg.

FRED RUTTEN will replace Ronald Koeman in charge of Feyenoord next season. Koeman had announced earlier this year that he would not be renewing his contract.

EUSEBIO DI FRANCESCO, who was sacked in January, returned to lead Sassuolo after his replacement, Alberto Malesani, lost all five of his games in charge of the relegation-threatened Serie A side. Internazionale's sporting director **PIERO AUSILIO** took over from Marco Branca as technical director.

JORGE PAIXAO of Portuguese second division side Farense succeeded Jesualdo Ferreira as coach of top-tier club Braga.

Former assistant **IHOR RAKHAYEV** was placed in control of Metalist Kharkiv when Myron Markevych stepped down after nine years in charge of the club.

BERNARD CHALLANDES is Armenia's new coach, while **PIERANGELO MANZAROLI** succeeded Giampaolo Mazza as boss of San Marino.

Belgian club Leuven gave Lokeren's Croatian midfielder **IVAN LEKO** his first job as head coach.

AIDY BOOTHROYD will become coach of England's under-20 side following this summer's Toulon Tournament in France.

LEIF GUNNAR SMERUD was named coach of Norway's under-21 side, replacing Tor Ole Skullerud who left to take charge of Molde.

SOUTH AMERICA

Former Uruguay midfielder **PABLO BENGOECHEA** was named Peru coach. He was previously assistant to compatriot Sergio Markarian, who resigned in October.

CONCACAF

Colombian **HERNAN DARIO GOMEZ** was named coach of Panama's national team.

CARLOS BARRA and **JOSE TREVINO** will take charge of Monterrey for the remainder of the Mexican season after Jose Guadalupe Cruz was dismissed.

Costa Rican international defender **GIANCARLO GONZALEZ** joined MLS side Columbus Crew from Valerenga of Norway.

SUNIL GULATI was re-elected president of the US Soccer Federation for another four years.

AFRICA

PETER BUTLER replaced Stanley Tshosane as coach of Botswana, while **ROMEU FILEMON** took over Angola's national team.

Former Kaizer Chiefs boss **VLADIMIR VERMEZOVIC** was named coach of South African rivals Orlando Pirates, succeeding Roger De Sa.

German coach **OTTO PFISTER** took charge of Sudanese champions Al Merreikh for a second time, replacing compatriot Michel Kruger, who was dismissed after the 3-2 aggregate defeat by Kampala City Council of Uganda in the CAF Champions League preliminary round.

ASIA

China appointed former Marseille and Lyon boss **ALAIN PERRIN** as coach of the national side.

China calling...Perrin

Former Atletico Madrid and Sevilla coach **GREGORIO MANZANO**, who led Mallorca to victory in the 2003 Spanish Cup, replaced Aleksandar Stanojevic in charge of Chinese club Beijing Guoan.

SOUTH AMERICA

Adriano back in the game

Former Brazil striker **ADRIANO** joined Atletico Paranaense after 15 months out of the game. The 32-year-old had his contract with Flamengo cancelled in November 2012.

Ending his exile...Adriano

Appointments, sackings and loans

OUT

EUROPE

- Greece national coach **FERNANDO SANTOS**, who has been in charge for four years, will leave after this summer's World Cup in Brazil.
- Barcelona captain **CARLES PUYOL** will leave the Spanish club at the end of the season. Vitesse and Holland midfielder **THEO JANSSEN** has retired due to ongoing knee problems.
- Porto parted company with coach **PAULO FONSECA**.
- Eintracht Frankfurt coach **ARMIN VEH** will leave the club at the end of the season.
- Belgian side Genk sacked Dutch coach **MARIO BEEN** after a 2-0 loss at home to Beveren – their eighth defeat in 10 games.

Bowing out... Gomaa (left)

AFRICA

- Al Ahly's 38-year-old defender **WAEL GOMAA** has announced that he will retire at the end of the current season. During his 13 years at the club, they have won six CAF Champions League titles, six CAF Super Cups, seven Egyptian league crowns, three Egyptian Cups and six Egyptian Super Cups.

OCEANIA

- **IVAN VICELICH,** who is New Zealand's most-capped player with 88 senior appearances, has retired from international football. The 37-year-old central defender will, however, continue to play for club side Auckland City.

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Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Memories of Finney, one of the greats

What if Tom Finney had gone to Palermo, as he wanted to in 1952? Whatever Jimmy Armfield may sentimentally have said – one-club man and all the rest of it – the evidence is clear enough.

When the flamboyant and sometimes confrontational president of Palermo, Prince Di Trabia, offered Finney riches beyond the imagination at a time when the maximum wage in England was £14 a week, how could he, however devoted to his birthplace, ever have resisted? Not least as he had fought his way through Sicily and Italy during the war, sometimes as a tank driver, and knew the country well enough.

But the iniquitous contractual laws of the time meant Finney, and every other league player, was bound hand and foot. Club chairmen ruled imperiously – and the Preston North End chairman told Finney that there was no way he would be allowed to leave. And so Finney played and plumbed on.

Not remotely enough in his various obituaries has been made of the remarkable way he burst into prominence at Wembley in 1941 when playing for Preston against Arsenal in the Final of the short-lived Football League War Cup, standing in for the suspended FA. The 19-year-old Finney turned the Arsenal defence inside out. Preston drew 1-1, then won the replay at Blackburn against a Gunners team reduced to 10 men.

From that Wembley moment, Finney was seen as a refulgent star and he wasn't forgotten in the five long years he spent on active service, by contrast with the great majority of prominent British footballers who were enlisted, at the instance of the government, in the army or RAF physical training corps.

The astonishing thing is that, after those five years out of football, Finney returned to England and went seamlessly into the national team as though he had never been away.

Finney or Matthews? It became an endless debate, germinated when, in 1946, Tom was preferred to Stanley on the England right wing. Matthews regained his role in March 1947, shortly before the selectors had the belated sense to use him on the right and Finney on the left in Lisbon when, that May, Portugal were thrashed 10-0. A natural left footer, Finney had no difficulty in adapting. A year later the two worked the oracle again in Turin when, after a torrid first half, Finney scored twice, thanks to Matthews' mastery of the hapless Italy left-back, Alberto Eliani, and England won 4-0.

Comparisons were odious; these were two indisputably great players each possessed of that insidious swerve which put opposing full-backs on the wrong foot while Tom or Stanley went down the line to pull the ball back in to the goalmouth.

> Finney wanted to go to Palermo but Preston told him there was no way he would be allowed to leave

It was Stanley, not Tom, who played for Great Britain against the Rest of Europe at Hampden in May 1947; Matthews, not Finney, who was selected European Footballer of the Year. But Finney was never as controversial a figure and wasn't initially dropped from the England 1950 World Cup squad as Matthews was. And Matthews could never have been the superb deep-lying centre-forward that Finney became in his last days at Preston.

Aquaplaning...Preston's Finney is engulfed at a waterlogged Stamford Bridge while playing against Chelsea in 1956

Not forgetting Bert and Mario, too

Resilient against Italy...Williams

Finney was not the only football great to have passed away recently.

Bert Williams, that superb goalkeeper, was at his resilient peak when I saw him hold Italy at bay in the fog at Tottenham in 1949. An Italy team torn apart by the Superga air disaster of the previous May, which wiped out the Torino squad who were on their way to a fifth successive Italian title. To their colossal credit the Italians, in just those few months, had rebuilt an excellent side, which dominated England and would surely have won at a canter if not for Williams' astonishing display.

To pull off one save he literally changed direction in mid-air to reach and repel the ball, which left the Italy left-winger Riccardo Carapellese beating the ground in frustration.

Williams earned his renown with Wolverhampton Wanderers but previously he was at humble Walsall, coached by England's most eminent pre-war manager Harry Hibbs.

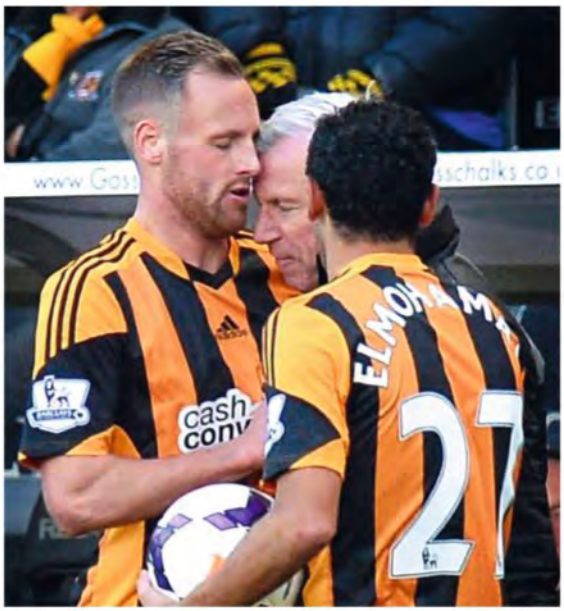
And then there was Mario Coluna, he of the elegant technique and pulverising left foot. An outstanding athlete in his native Mozambique, at 17 he became national high-jump champion before giving his full attention to football and proving himself to be an inspirational captain of Portugal at the 1966 World Cup. He was a centre-forward when Benfica brought him to Lisbon in 1954, but he struggled in that role and Otto Gloria, their Brazilian manager, shifted him to inside-left, where he did so well he was nicknamed "the Portuguese Didi".

He moved to left-half when Eusebio, also from Mozambique, emerged. One

> To pull off one save he literally changed direction in mid-air

of Gloria's predecessors, Bela Guttmann, said Coluna couldn't mark anybody, "he has to run up and down the whole field".

But how splendidly he did so. His ferocious shooting brought him goals in the two consecutive victorious European Cup Finals, against Barcelona in Berne, in 1961, and Real Madrid in Amsterdam, in 1962. And had he not been kicked off the Wembley field by Milan's Gino Pivatelli in 1963, would Benfica have lost that game?



Head to head... Pardew confronts Hull's David Meyler

Ban won't solve Pardew problem

Alan Pardew is a likeable, genial and friendly fellow when he is not cavorting on the touchline. Once there, Dr Jekyll, as we saw once again at Hull City, tends to mutate into Mr Hyde. Just how far and well anger management works I am not sure, but if ever there were a belated candidate for it, it must surely be Pardew.

That crazy explosion at Hull was merely the latest in an embarrassingly long line of such incidents. I remember all too graphically, since I was there, what happened years ago at West Ham United when the Hammers, managed by Pardew, had just scored what turned out to be the winning goal against Arsenal. Pardew wasn't violent then, but he simply went berserk, dancing and cavorting dervish-like on the touchline. It was all too much for Arsene Wenger, standing beside him who, in his outrage, unsurprisingly confronted Pardew furiously.

On that occasion the sequel was a heavy fine for Wenger, who had to be restrained and none, least of all the latest £100,000 penalty with more to come from the FA, for Pardew. But it was an all too significant piece of wild behaviour. Suspending him for however many matches won't get to the heart of the problem. He needs help and would probably welcome it.

What after all, could be dottier than running amok when your team is on the way to a famous victory? **WS**

● Brian Glanville's 'The Story of the World Cup' is out now (Faber & Faber, £14.99)

Sol's captaincy complaint is misplaced

For my part, I would have been perfectly happy for Sol Campbell or any other black player to captain England for 10 years, five years or as long as you like. It simply seems to me that the captaincy has long been a meaningless appointment.

Football captains are not like cricket captains who, when their team is in the field, choose the bowlers and set the field. They are largely at the mercy of whoever is coaching or managing their team. Indeed, let me remind you of the fact the captain of Italy was simply and automatically the player who had won the most caps.

Many years ago, there was a problem. The two Italy full-backs were the Fiorentina pair Aldo Magnini and Sergio Cervato, who each had exactly the same number of international appearances. How to resolve the problem? Simple. Give the role to Magnini who had won one more B cap than Cervato...

Speaking out...Campbell feels he was denied the chance to lead his country

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The race to be ready

Brazil's stadium preparations continue to be beset with problems, but for the moment the 32 finalists are more concerned with fine-tuning their squads. By Gavin Hamilton

In March, most of the World Cup finalists played their final friendly matches before the provisional lists of 30 are named in May.

While the coaches finalise their squads, serious problems remain off the pitch in Brazil, particularly with the stadiums in Curitiba and Sao Paulo.

Curitiba earned a reprieve from FIFA in February barely a month after the world governing body threatened to axe it as a host city following its failure to meet a series of deadlines.

FIFA secretary-general Jerome Valcke said the decision to retain the city came after rapid progress on contructing the 41,000-seater Arena da Baixada.

"Yes, Curitiba will remain as one of the 12 host cities," Valcke said. "It is a race against a very tight timeline and will require regular monitoring."

Axing Curitiba would have dealt a humiliating blow to Brazil, and could have sparked a complicated process of legal compensation claims and counter-claims.

In Belo Horizonte there have been further problems with the Mineirao Stadium, which will host one of the semi-finals. Three pieces of the stadium roof were blown onto the pitch during a storm just hours before a regional championship match was due to start.

Nobody was hurt but the accident took place as FIFA confirmed that the Itaquerao stadium in Sao Paulo will not be finished until less than four weeks before Brazil play Croatia in the Opening Match on June 12. The Itaquerao stadium was supposed to be ready by mid-April but construction was delayed after a crane collapsed in November killing two workers.

"It's true that whenever you receive something late then it's a challenge to make this thing ready on time," Valcke acknowledged.

Even if construction of the stadiums in Sao Paulo and Curitiba is completed in time, work is still needed to prepare the venues to host matches, media and sponsors. Fitting out of stadiums typically takes 90 days, but will now be rushed through.

"There is no criticism, there is just a challenge," Valcke said. "For sure the stadiums are beautiful. It will work and you will have what you expected."

The delays to the stadium construction have pushed costs up and resulted in funding being cut back on other infrastructure.

"As far as transport, security and

World Cup 2014 Update

possible outbreaks of violence, it's going to be very complicated," said Mauricio Murad, a well-known sociologist and expert on football-related violence. "I'm pessimistic, I don't think the authorities will be in a position to solve the problems. It's already too late."

The teams cannot afford to be distracted by such off-field problems. All eyes were on the March friendlies for signs of who will make the cut.

ALGERIA

Tottenham Hotspur's 19-year-old midfielder Nabil Bentaleb, who was born in Lille and has been capped by France at under-19 level, pledged his international future to Algeria and made his debut in a 2-0 win against Slovenia. Playmaker Sofiane Feghouli missed the match after undergoing dental surgery.

ARGENTINA

Getafe centre-back Lisandro Lopez and Catania full-back Gino Peruzzi were surprise call-ups for the friendly against Romania, as coach Alex Sabella looked at alternative defensive options. But there was again no place for Juventus forward Carlos Tevez, while Tottenham winger Erik Lamela also missed out. Lionel Messi struggled with illness but still played the whole 90 minutes of the 0-0 draw, despite being physically sick after just seven minutes.

Sick...Messi

AUSTRALIA

Tim Cahill scored twice against Ecuador to become the Socceroos' all-time leading goalscorer with 31, but his team surrendered a three-goal half-time lead for the first time in their history to lose 4-3 as goalkeeper Mitch Langerak was sent off.

Lucas Neill, the 35-year-old defender who joined English second-tier side Watford on a short-term deal in February to boost his chances of making it to Brazil, and Al Gharafa's 34-year-old midfielder Mark Bresciano were left out of the squad to play Ecuador, along with another 2010 World Cup veteran, Brett Holman. With Rhys Williams and Robbie Kruse still injured, coach Ange Postecoglou picked a youthful side, captained by new skipper Mile Jedinek, the Crystal Palace midfielder.

Postecoglou said he wanted to build "the next golden generation" and gave debuts to Swindon Town midfielder Massimo Luongo and defender Curtis Good of Newcastle United, who is on loan at Dundee United.

BELGIUM

Anderlecht defender Anthony Vanden Borre returned to the squad for the first time in over two years for the friendly with Ivory Coast. Radja Nainggolan's performances in Italy were rewarded with a call-up in place of the injured Steven Defour, while Standard Liege's Laurent Ciman replaced Thomas Vermaelen. But there were no places for youngsters Thorgan Hazard, Michy Batshuayi and Maxime Lestienne.

Eden Hazard played the last 30 minutes of the 2-2 draw as a late equaliser again exposed Belgium's defensive frailties.

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Coach Safet Susic introduced two new players – Tino Sven Susic (his nephew) from Hajduk Split and Anel Hadzic of Sturm Graz – for the 2-0 loss to Egypt. Edin Dzeko was booed during the match, but complained afterwards that he had "arrived injured and was supposed to play first half...only Susic knows why I stayed on the pitch for the whole match".

BRAZIL

Ronaldinho's chances of playing in this summer's finals are dwindling after coach Luiz Felipe Scolari left the 33-year-old out of the squad to face South Africa. Scolari gave first starts to Bayern Munich defender Rafinha and Manchester City midfielder Fernandinho – who scored his first international goal in the 5-0 win, with Neymar recording his second international hat-trick.

Fluminense striker Fred, who has not played for the national side since August and been absent for the past six months with a serious thigh injury, was recalled.

CAMEROON

Striker Mohamadou Idrissou, now 33, replaced the injured Achille Webo for the friendly against Portugal, in which Cameroon suffered a humiliating 5-1 defeat. Stephane Mbia (injured) was also absent and Sebastien Bassong ignored, while 18-year-old centre-back Frank Bagnack, from Barcelona's B team, received his first call-up.

Draw...Ivory Coast (in green) and Belgium

First goal...Fernandinho

Teen star...Shaw

CHILE

Veteran Fiorentina midfielder David Pizarro was left out of a squad of 19 foreign-based players to play Germany. Coach Jorge Sampaoli also omitted Swedish-born defender Miiko Albornoz, who made his debut in January's 4-0 win over Costa Rica, but recalled Celta Vigo forward Fabian Orellana.

COLOMBIA

With Radamel Falcao still absent through injury, and Fredy Guarin and Jackson Martinez among those who started on the bench, a make-shift side drew 1-1 with Tunisia in Barcelona.

COSTA RICA

Goals from in-form Olympiakos forward Joel Campbell and Alvaro Saborio gave Costa Rica a 2-1 win over Paraguay and ended a run of four games without a goal. The friendly in San Jose was their last home game before the World Cup but was played in front of a disappointing crowd of only 12,000.

CROATIA

Coach Niko Kovac left out Nikola Kalinic, Sammir and Alen Halilovic from the squad to face Switzerland. The friendly ended 2-2, with both of Croatia's goals scored by veteran striker Ivica Olic.

ECUADOR

Reinaldo Rueda warned that the remarkable comeback against Australia, winning 4-3 after being 3-0 down, could not disguise his team's defensive weaknesses against teams that play at a high tempo. Jorge Guagua was preferred to Fricson Erazo in central defence.

ENGLAND

Ashley Cole won his 107th cap in England's 1-0 win against Denmark, but the 33-year-old Chelsea left-back faces competition for a place in Roy Hodgson's final squad this summer from Southampton's 18-year-old Luke Shaw, who won his first cap when replacing Cole at half-time. On the other flank, Liverpool right-back Glen Johnson won his 50th cap. A tackle by Danish captain

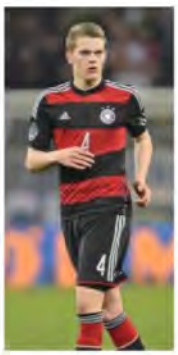
Daniel Agger resulted in Jack Wilshere suffering a fractured metatarsal, which is expected to sideline him for eight weeks.

FRANCE

Real Sociedad striker Antoine Griezmann and Paris Saint-Germain left-back Lucas Digne made their debuts in an impressive 2-0 victory over Holland in Paris as Karim Benzema and Blaise Matuidi scored spectacular first-half goals. With Laurent Koscielny injured, Eliaquim Mangala was paired with Raphael Varane in central defence, the ninth different duo used by coach Didier Deschamps.

GERMANY

With Julian Draxler and Marco Reus rested, and Thomas Muller injured for the friendly against Chile, Shkodran Mustafi (Sampdoria), Andre Hahn (Augsburg) and striker Pierre-Michel Lasogga (Hamburg) all joined the squad, while Freiburg defender Matthias Ginter made his debut in the 1-0 win over Chile in Stuttgart. Mesut Ozil provided the assist for Mario Gotze but he was still a target for frustrated fans, who booed him.



Sub...Ginter became Germany's 900th international player

Borussia Dortmund midfielder Sven Bender faces a race against time to be fit after being diagnosed with having an inflammation of the pubic bone.

GHANA

Goalkeeper Fatau Dauda, who was first choice at last year's African Nations Cup, was left out of the squad for the game against Montenegro due to a lack of games for his South African club side, Orlando Pirates. Stephen Adams of Aduana Stars took his place.

Kevin-Prince Boateng and Asamoah Gyan were second-half substitutes but their introduction could not overhaul the 1-0 lead earned by Dejan Damjanovic's first-minute penalty for Montenegro.

GREECE

Fernando Santos' side suffered a 2-0 home defeat to South Korea. First-

WORLD CUP 2014

Tim VICKERY

THE VIEW FROM BRAZIL

Lessons may have been learned, but some security concerns still remain

"FIFA is not coming to Brazil with less people. We are not hiding ourselves or our symbol," said the organisation's director of decurity Ralf Mutschke at the mid-February seminar in Florianopolis. "We are proud to be here."

It is an approach based on his analysis of the political situation in the country, especially the mass demonstrations that flared up during the Confederations Cup and threaten to do so again this June and July.

FIFA appointed Mutschke, a German policeman with an Interpol background, two years ago when match fixing was seen as the principal threat. Instead, he has been forced to become an expert on the local political scene as everyone was taken aback by the strength of popular discontent on the issue of public spending on football tournaments.

Mutschke's conclusion is that "FIFA is not really feeling it is a target for the demonstrations" but the shock was huge, and FIFA secretary general Jerome Valcke has since confessed that there was a point in the Confederations Cup when the suspension of the tournament was considered – something which would have put the World Cup in jeopardy.

Valuable lessons

FIFA will have learned some valuable lessons, especially in co-ordinating security operations on a national basis. The ministries of justice and defence have been working together with FIFA and the Local Organising Committee to ensure that the World Cup goes off without a hitch.

Andrei Rodrigues of the justice ministry argues that the authorities "are not worried by the demonstrations in themselves – this is part of the democratic process, and we will guarantee the right to protest peacefully. Our focus will be on the prevention and the control of violence."

Anti-World Cup protests continue to erupt around Brazil and would seem sure to take place during the tournament. One possible scenario, though, is that they will not attract anything like the same quantity of people who took to the streets during the Confederations Cup – not just because the World Cup is incalculably more important to local society but also due to the possibility that less politicised Brazilians are being put off by the activists looking for trouble.

This is part of the backdrop to the latest cause of organisational tension. The city of Recife is unwilling to pay for its World Cup Fan Fest, with other venues also twitching. But this is an infringement of the Host City Agreement signed with FIFA, who view the Fan Fests as an integral part of the World Cup experience as they are an important showcase for FIFA's commercial partners.

But it also means that they are an extra target for demonstrators. "What does not seem to have occurred to FIFA, but worries the Brazilian authorities," writes Juca Kfouri, is that the Fan Fests "could facilitate the organisation of protests and complicate the security operation around the stadiums, by doubling the demands of policing."

And there is a further cause for concern. It is striking how the theme of "security" and that of "the demonstrations" have become synonymous. It is perhaps understandable why this should have happened in the international media, since burning cars and smashed up banks produce such dramatic images. But the press conference in Florianopolis also barely touched on any other aspects of the security operation.

The fear is, then, that not enough attention is being paid to the random street violence that blights Brazil's major cities. My own experience at the Confederations Cup serves as a lesson of the dangers.

In Salvador I was a couple of miles down the coast from the five-star belt, in a three-star hotel. There was little police presence and I was mugged at gunpoint at one o'clock in the afternoon. The thief had clearly been watching the hotels, and followed on his bicycle before jumping me at a selected, secluded spot.

Twenty years in big-city Brazil prepares you for this type of situation. But for the uninitiated it can be very traumatic, and sudden, panicky reactions can have disastrous consequences.

This kind of street robbery will not happen to the vast majority of World Cup fans, but those on the wrong end of a gun or a knife may not forget it in a hurry. WS

choice keepers Orestis Karnezis and Michalis Sifakis were rested, with PAOK's 27-year-old Panagiotis Glykos called up for the first time. Kostas Mitroglou started and played 60 minutes despite being on the bench at Fulham after his £12million move from Olympiakos in January.

HOLLAND

Holland suffered their first defeat since August 2012, going down 2-0 to France and ending a 17-match unbeaten run. Feyenoord striker Jean-Paul Boetius, PSV defender Karim Rekik, midfielder Davy Klaassen of Ajax and Twente winger Quincy Promes all made their debuts as coach Louis Van Gaal experimented in the absence of injured Arjen Robben and Rafael Van der Vaart.

HONDURAS

Stoke City midfielder Wilson Palacios, who has only played three league games in the last two months, was left out of the squad to play Venezuela. Also omitted were Wisla Krakow defender Osman Chavez and Real Espana forward Carlo Costly, who are both recovering from injury. Four uncapped players from the domestic league earned their first call-ups: keeper Luis Lopez (Real Espana) and defenders Walter Williams (Real Sociedad), Bryan Acosta (Real Espana) and Henry Clark (Real Sociedad).

Jerry Bengston and Jerry Palacios scored for Honduras in the 2-1 victory in San Pedro Sula.

IRAN

Injured midfielder Andranik Teymourian was missing for the disappointing 2-1 home defeat by Guinea. And coach Carlos Queiroz is unhappy about his team's lack of friendlies ahead of the finals and the cancelation of a training camp in Portugal, commenting: "Without financial support, I'm not a magician."

ITALY

Cesare Prandelli gave first caps to Torino forward Ciro Immobile and Parma's Argentinian-born defender Gabriel Paletta in the 1-0 defeat by Spain. Paletta was widely recognised as Italy's best performer in a generally poor performance. Milan striker Mario Balotelli was absent through injury while midfielder Daniele De Rossi was omitted as punishment for hitting Inter's Mauro Icardi in a league match.

IVORY COAST

Didier Drogba was a half-time substitute against Belgium in Brussels as coach Sabri Lamouchi opted to start with Basle striker Giovanni-Guy Yann Sio, along with Gervinho and Salomon Kalou. Drogba sparked a comeback from 2-0 down when he scored midway through the second half and another sub, Max-Alain Gradel, grabbed an injury-time equaliser. Defender Sol Bamba missed the game with an ankle injury.

JAPAN

Shinji Okazaki became the country's joint-third top scorer of all time, with 38 goals, as he scored twice in a 4-2 victory over New Zealand. Shinji Kagawa scored his first international goal for six months as left-back Yuto Nagatomo captained the team in the absence of the injured Makoto Hasebe. The game was the last to be played at the National Stadium in Tokyo before it is demolished to make way for a new arena for the 2020 Olympics.

Record...Okazaki

MEXICO

Alan Pulido, who scored a hat-trick on his debut against South Korea in January, featured as a sub in the 0-0 draw with Nigeria in Atlanta. Coach Miguel Herrera called up a number of European-based players, including Andres Guardado, now with Bayer Leverkusen. He kept faith with Javier Hernandez, pairing him with Oribe Peralta, but he again failed to score.

Herrera plans to use a friendly against USA in Pheonix on April 2 to try out Mexican-based players.

NIGERIA

Almeria midfielder Ramon Azeez and strikers Imoh Ezekiel of Standard Liege and Cercle Brugge's Michael Uchebo made their senior debuts in the goalless draw with Mexico.

Norwich defender Joseph Yobo was recalled to the squad but did not play. In-form Villarreal striker Ikechukwu Uche and Stoke City's Peter Odemwingie were overlooked, as were Sunday Mba, Brown Ideye, John Ogu, Nnamdi Oduamadi and Chigozie Agbim.

Toronto striker Bright Dike will miss the finals after tearing an Achilles tendon for the second time in three years and undergoing surgery.

Debutant...Uchebo

PORTUGAL

Cristiano Ronaldo's two goals in the 5-1 win against Cameroon made him Portugal's all-time top scorer with 49 goals.

Benfica striker Ivan Cavaleiro and midfielder Rafa Silva of Braga won their first caps but Rui Patricio, Bruno Alves, Nani and Helder Postiga were all left out of the squad.

Double...Drmic

RUSSIA

Coach Fabio Capello called up uncapped Lokomotiv Moscow defender Maxim Belyaev for the friendly against Armenia. The Russian league top scorer Rostov's Artem Dzyuba was in a provisional squad but didn't make the cut.

SOUTH KOREA

Striker Park Chu-young, on loan at Watford from Arsenal, boosted his chances of making the final 23 when he scored in the 2-0 win over Greece in Athens. It was his first appearance for South Korea since February 2013.

SPAIN

Brazilian-born Diego Costa made his Spain debut in the 1-0 victory over Italy in Madrid. But the Atletico Madrid striker, who had been called up for two friendlies in November but missed out through injury, made little impression and the only goal was scored by Pedro. A number of big names had been omitted from the squad, including Juan Mata, Fernando Torres, Alvaro Arbeloa, David Villa, Fernando Llorente and Carles Puyol.

Spain's Brazilian... Costa (left)

SWITZERLAND

Nuremberg's 21-year-old Josip Drmic may have played himself into the reckoning after scoring twice in the 2-2 draw with Croatia – the homeland of his father – in St Gallen.

URUGUAY

Coach Oscar Tabarez is sticking with the old guard despite a tepid 1-1 draw with Austria. Uruguay's starting line-up included four players over the age of 30, including 34-year-old Diego Forlan in attack, and none younger than 27. Striker Christian Stuani started in place of the injured Edinson Cavani.

UNITED STATES

Jurgen Klinsmann included Will Packwood, an uncapped 20-year-old defender with Birmingham City and 18-year-old Bayern Munich dual-citizen striker Julian Green in the squad of European-based players for the friendly against Ukraine, which was relocated to Larnaca in Cyprus following the political turmoil in Ukraine. A makeshift US team lost 2-0.

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The new MLS season kicks off, with Landon Donovan and Clint Dempsey leading the way.

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The Principality's financial advantages could see Monaco expelled from Ligue 1.

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With Carlos Tevez in inspired form, Juventus look unstoppable in Serie A.

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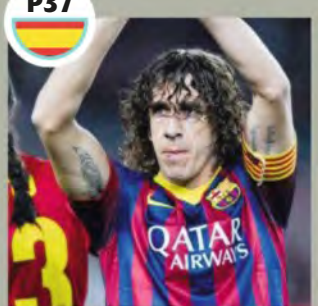

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Barcelona captain Carles Puyol has said that this will be his last season at Camp Nou.

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FIFA has stopped its annual US$250,000 in aid after money appears to have gone missing.

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The new season begins with several managerial changes and surprise early leaders.

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Fifteen of the 16 finalists for next January's Asian Cup in Australia have now been decided.

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A new chapter in its footballing history begins with a friendly international against Haiti.

PAUL GARDNER
in New York

Onwards and upwards for MLS

League goes from strength to strength as it enters its 19th term

In its 18 years of existence, Major League Soccer has achieved a great deal – and the biggest of its achievements is contained in those words "18 years of existence", for it has survived longer than any other national pro soccer league in the United States.

In 2013, MLS had 19 clubs, 11 of which were playing in recently constructed soccer-specific stadiums, which seems to support the old "if you build it, they'll come" cliche. The average MLS attendance in 2000 was 13,756 and it is now 18,608 – although Seattle Sounders, having set new attendance records for five seasons in a row with their massive 44,000 average, have helped greatly. But the astonishing success of the Sounders is itself evidence of MLS' growing strength.

On the financial front, there is news of a sort that soccer people are not used to hearing. Last year, the prestigious *Forbes* magazine reported that 10 of the 19 teams were making a profit and two were breaking even. Since 2008 the value of an MLS franchise – that is, the amount that an investor wishing to form a new club would have to pay for those rights – had risen from $37million to $103m. And that is an average figure, with the Seattle Sounders franchise estimated to be worth $175m.

For MLS to be showing signs of prosperity is a double-edged sword for commissioner Don Garber. He now faces talks with the players union over a new collective-bargaining agreement and a money-making league will mean more demands from the players. No surprise, then, that Garber insists that MLS loses between $75m and $100m a year.

Perhaps the most convincing way of measuring MLS' potential value is to look at its expansion plans. The aim is to have a league of 24 teams by the end of the decade. Two new teams are scheduled to begin play in 2015, with Orlando City marking the return of MLS to Florida and the drably-named New York City FC disguising an exciting new ownership group headed by the sheikhs who bankroll Manchester City.

The New York team already has its coach – Jason Kreis, who was formerly in charge at Real Salt Lake – but not much else that can be identified. The prime concern is to find somewhere to play – which, to abide by MLS regulations, means finding somewhere to build a stadium in New York City. While that is far from easy, one of the partners in the ownership group, the New York Yankees baseball club, has its eye on a site in the Bronx, right next to Yankee Stadium. With easy road, rail and subway access it would be a dream site, but the politics involved in building a stadium in the city are likely to be infernally complicated.

Then there is David Beckham and his group, who have announced their intention to form a team in Miami, scheduled to start playing in 2016. But where NYC FC has been granted a franchise without having a stadium, Beckham has been told that approval of his venture must wait until he builds a new stadium. He says he is committed to do that, in downtown Miami.

Back in the game...Beckham (centre) announces his plans for a Miami franchise

Cautionary note

To this ebullient view of the MLS future, a cautionary note must be added. As new clubs arrive – and MLS now has a waiting list of cities seeking entry – there has been one setback. Chivas USA, an expansion club back in 2005, has basically failed. Its investor has sold the franchise back to the league, which will operate the club until new investors have been found.

Even this sad event had its positive side in the performance of Garber as he made the announcement, speaking commandingly and convincingly on the move and of his confidence in finding new owners. He made what would once have been an apologetic admission sound like a triumph for MLS.

Garber's gung-ho mood is largely justified. Under his leadership MLS has fought off failure and has reached the point where over half its clubs now make money. If television viewing figures still lag, there is ample evidence that the major networks are now considerably interested in soccer.

MLS is reported to have agreed a new deal with ESPN and Fox worth some $70m, to which can be added another deal with Spanish language Univision. NBC is – with plenty of publicity – showing all English Premier League games live. Whether this airing of a star-studded foreign league helps or hurts MLS remains open to question, of course.

In a country that legally frowns on almost anything that can be called "restraint of trade", MLS has to live with plenty of competition from international soccer. This summer's World Cup, for instance, is a direct competitor because MLS plays during the summer. For the first time, MLS will take a break in its schedule – during the first round of World Cup action.

> "I think the league is poised for more teams in time, but we're going to be careful about ensuring that we get them into the league at the right time"
> MLS commissioner Don Garber

Maybe that will help interest in MLS because it seems quite possible that most of the players in Jurgen Klinsmann's national team will be from the league. The three biggest names – Landon Donovan, Michael Bradley, and Clint Dempsey – all now play back home.

The return of Dempsey, from Tottenham Hotspur, and Bradley, from Roma, is arguably the most important MLS event of the new season as it underlines the fact that clubs are now willing to pay big money for top players, money that can compete with European salaries. The 30-year-old Dempsey was given a three-and-a-half-year contract which, along with the transfer fee, cost Seattle $33m. Bradley, four years younger, has a six-year deal with Toronto, who shelled out $36m.

At the moment such salaries apply only to so-called "Designated Players" and are limited to three per club. But a slow increase in the permitted number of DPs seems likely as MLS tries to convert itself from a league playing under a single-entity structure (with its centralised control and strict salary-cap regulations), to one that will be able to compete for top players at a global level.

In the long run, it may be more

Here's to keeping the best at home...USA internationals Donovan and Dempsey greet each other before Los Angeles Galaxy take on Seattle Sounders

important for MLS to pay much better salaries to young Americans to prevent them going to Europe. All MLS clubs now have academies but their value will obviously be questionable if European clubs carry off the best youngsters before they have had a chance to contribute to the league.

This season will see coaching changes at 11 of the clubs, so increased competitiveness and job insecurity may well be causing MLS coaches to adopt more defensive tactics.

If MLS appears to be travelling over ground already well-trodden by other leagues, there is one path where it leads the way, where it has broken new ground and set an example for everyone else.

In 2013, when Robbie Rogers joined Los Angeles Galaxy, MLS became the most high-profile league with an openly gay player.

The effects were barely noticeable, the sky did not fall and Rogers was accepted agreeably by players and fans alike. WS

KEY DATES

Regular season starts
March 8, 2014

Regular season ends
October 26, 2014

MLS Cup play-offs
(still to be confirmed)

MLS 2014

Western Conference

1. Chivas USA (Los Angeles)
   Los Angeles Galaxy
2. Colorado Rapids
3. Dallas
4. Portland Timbers
5. Real Salt Lake
6. San Jose Earthquakes
7. Seattle Sounders
8. Vancouver Whitecaps

Eastern Conference

9. Chicago Fire
10. Columbus Crew
11. DC United (Washington DC)
12. Houston Dynamo
13. Montreal Impact
14. New England Revolution (Foxborough)
15. New York Red Bulls (Harrison, New Jersey)
16. Philadelphia Union
17. Sporting Kansas City
18. Toronto

HOWARD JOHNSON
in Paris

Rivals set to oppose Monaco deal

Ligue 1 clubs say €50million agreement is not enough

Monaco's continued participation in Ligue 1 is under threat once again with six top-flight sides set to oppose the Principality club's €50million deal with the French league.

All businesses based in Monaco pay considerably lower social charges than those in France, while individual residents pay less income tax – even more so since the French government introduced a 75 per cent supertax for people earning over €1m a year. In a footballing context, this means that AS Monaco have traditionally enjoyed significant financial advantages over their Ligue 1 rivals.

But when the club's rich Russian owner Dmitry Rybolovlev started to use such fiscal arrangements to sign the likes of Radamel Falcao, rival teams really started to cry foul.

Up in the air...Monaco's right to compete in the French league has been called into question

> "The discussions with the LFP were held legally and transparently and the vote resulted in a large majority of 16 in favour of the deal"
>
> Monaco's view of the challenge to their agreement

In April last year, the French league, the Ligue de Football Professionel (LFP), ruled that clubs whose financial affairs were run from outside France could no longer compete in its leagues. This would mean Monaco having to base their business elsewhere – and therefore comply with the same tax penalties – if they wished to continue in Ligue 1.

But a compromise was seemingly agreed in January – which was voted on by French club representatives, among others, and subsequently passed – resulting in Monaco making a "voluntary" and "one-off" payment to the LFP to carry on taking part in its competitions.

However, three weeks later, investigative magazine *Le Point* revealed that seven clubs had decided to oppose the resolution in the courts.

Rushed through

In a letter sent to other clubs, the presidents of Paris Saint-Germain, Marseille, Lille, Bordeaux, Montpellier and Lorient, plus second-tier Caen, outlined plans to go against the LFP decision, claiming the vote was rushed through, the deal was "insufficient" and that they intended to have the agreement annulled.

LFP president Frederic Thiriez reacted furiously to the news that the coup he had pulled off in supposedly resolving the problem had been so publicly undermined, with his stewardship called into question.

"That five clubs who were against this solution were outvoted doesn't give them the right to now discredit the procedures we went through," he argued. "This is a totally unacceptable calling into question of both the board and the president."

Thiriez went even further, claiming that there was an ulterior motive behind the legal move – which was to start strong-arming the LFP ahead of discussions on how Monaco's €50m would be distributed.

"This is a financially motivated and irresponsible position and will not be allowed to stop the implementation of the agreement," said Thiriez.

It is not beyond the realms of possibility that he has it spot-on, and that this is a shakedown by any other name. He also remains acutely aware that there needs to be a serious rival to mega-rich Paris Saint-Germain to make Ligue 1 competitive and substantially increase future revenue from worldwide TV rights.

But if Thiriez thought he had solved one problem, it looks as if he has unleashed another that may potentially be even more difficult to resolve. WS

NICK BIDWELL
in Munich

Bert bites the bullet

Van Marwijk is latest Hamburg coaching casualty

End of the line...Van Marwijk paid the price for failing to arrest Hamburg's slump

After achieving little in the Borussia Dortmund dug-out from 2004 to 2006, and lasting just 143 days at Hamburg before being sacked in February, Dutch coach Bert Van Marwijk is most unlikely to border-hop again.

The architect of Holland's silver medal at the 2010 World Cup started well enough on taking over from Thorsten Fink in September and he was unbeaten in his first four Bundesliga games. But by early December it was a different story, and after seven straight top-flight defeats – and a 5-0 home loss to Bayern Munich in the German Cup quarter-finals – Van Marwijk was axed, with ex-Schalke and Hanover boss Mirko Slomka brought in to pick up the pieces.

Hamburg's jitteriness, if not outright panic, is easily understood. As the only club to have played in every season of the Bundesliga since its inception in 1963, they have a unique position to maintain – and the widespread feeling in and around the Imtech Arena is that demotion will lead to implosion.

Apart from the Schalke "Theatre of Screams", no other German club is more adept at washing its dirty linen in public – and with debts of around €100m, and a culture of infighting in the corridors of power, the doomsday scenario could well play out.

The ninth coach to be fired by Hamburg in the past decade, Van Marwijk would probably have gone a week or two earlier if certain members of the board had succeeded in their attempts to bring in Felix Magath.

> "Unity at the club has to be the top priority. Without it we can do nothing"
>
> Felix Magath on why he turned down the chance to coach Hamburg again

A star with Hamburg in their glory days of the 1970s and 80s – and coach for a couple of years, from 1995 to 1997 – Magath apparently spoke with club insiders and would have jumped at the chance of becoming coach-cum-director of sport. But with three of the supervisory body resolutely opposed to his appointment, the deal collapsed, leaving the way clear for the ex-Bayern and Wolfsburg boss to join Fulham.

"Unfortunately there are too many examples of the old guard at HSV who want only to preserve their positions and are not interested in any new start," wrote Magath on his Facebook page.

"A number of the supervisory board, the executive committee and the HSV 'Group Plus' [an organisation of club members] were against me. In such conditions, how can one successfully lead a club in a relegation battle?"

The genial Slomka is a good motivator and smart tactically, but has little time to mount a rescue operation. Yet in his first game Hamburg stunned the nation with a 3-0 victory over Borussia Dortmund and if they continue with the same intensity, togetherness and defensive solidity they can survive.

With no fewer than 17 different coaches since 2000, it really is time for this famous old institution to turn over a new leaf – one built on stability, long-term planning and balanced budgets.

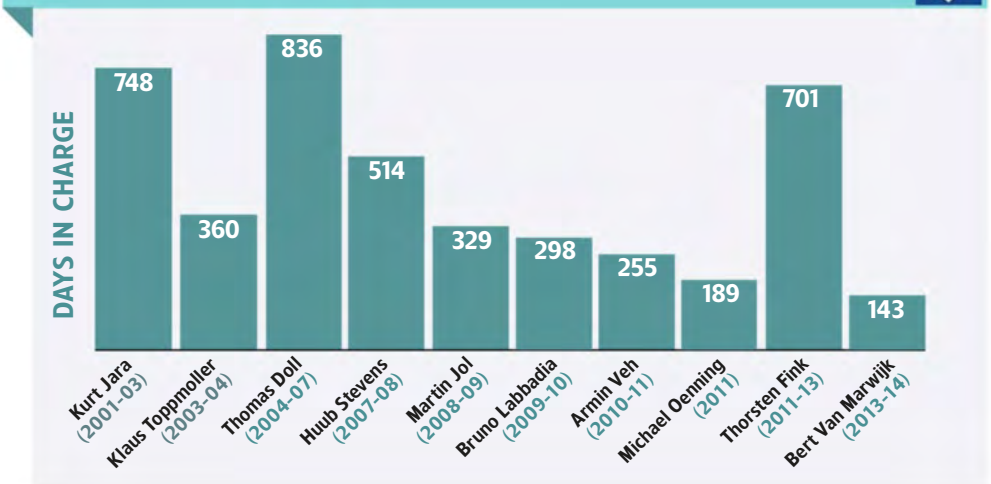
Free fall

Hamburg are not the only former Bundesliga champions trying to shake off relegation fever. Werder Bremen have been burrowing underground for the best part of four years, while a careless Stuttgart have gone into free fall since the winter break, losing game upon game.

To avoid the trapdoor, Stuttgart must kick the habit of losing concentration after taking the lead, while Bremen must remedy a toothless front line and a penchant for misplaced passes.

In the semi-finals of the German Cup, Dortmund play Wolfsburg and Bayern host second division Kaiserslautern, who booked their place with a 1-0 win at elite high-flyers Bayer Leverkusen. Beaten 4-0 at Bayern in the second round last season, they can enjoy the ride. No expectations. No pressure. WS

HAMBURG'S PREVIOUS 10 PERMANENT COACHES



TIM VICKERY
in Rio de Janeiro

A sorry state of affairs

Players set to strike over state championships

Brazil's state championships are dying on their feet. The tournaments – one for each of the country's 27 states have an important tradition but a depressing present.

Once, mere local rivalry was enough to sustain interest in a competition in which, usually in some sort of league, the giant teams took on their tiny neighbours. That time, though, has long gone. Television ratings are dwindling and crowds are tumbling, with only the Libertadores Cup to generate interest now until the national championship gets under way – a month earlier than usual owing to the pause for the World Cup – towards the end of April.

For the big clubs, the state championships do provide a cheap shot at glory, but the balance is overwhelmingly negative. They clutter up the year, preventing a proper pre-season and oblige clubs to play an excess of meaningless matches. They also force Brazil out of sync with the global calendar, meaning that domestic football cannot stop for FIFA dates, and they kill the start of the national championship which, like all league campaigns, needs a pause beforehand in order to achieve the "big kick-off" effect.

The state championships also prevent Brazil's major clubs from competing for players with the European giants. Quite apart from any financial considerations, what ambitious player would want to play on a terrible pitch in front of a few hundred spectators when he could be performing in the Champions League?

All sides suffer

It isn't just the big sides who suffer and it is hard to see how the current arrangement suits the interest of the smaller clubs as those not involved in the four national divisions have only four months of competitive fixtures a year.

One might think, therefore, that the clubs would be pushing for fundamental changes in the organisation of the domestic game. But this is not the case.

The most charitable reading of the situation might lead to the conclusion that the clubs are too feckless, dependent and amateurish to take a stand. It is just as well, then, that Brazil's players are doing the hard work for them.

Bom Senso FC, which means "common sense", is a movement that built up momentum in the second half of last year, uniting players from all Brazil's major clubs in a quest for better working conditions. Such a display of unity would have been unthinkable from Brazilian footballers a short while ago, but the country is undergoing a fascinating dynamic of change.

There is an obvious echo here of the street protests that sprung up so dramatically during the Confederations Cup. But there is also a clear difference. Those protests were disorganised; Bom Senso, on the other hand, has an impressive support structure, including lawyers and medical specialists, to help give authority to its set of proposals.

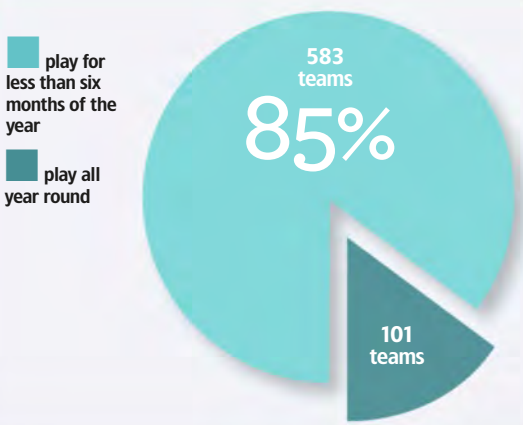
Key battleground

The key battleground is the calendar and the current place it gives to the state championships. "The majority of clubs in the country," says the movement's website, "play an average of only 17 games a year. At the end of the state championships 16,000 players become

> "We think this will be good for everyone. We can raise the standard of Brazilian football – for the fans, for the sponsors and for the players"
>
> Sao Paulo goalkeeper and Bom Senso supporter Rogerio Ceni

Solidarity...Internacional players stage a sit-down

BRAZIL HAS 684 PROFESSIONAL CLUBS



protest in support of the Bom Senso movement before a league game with Coritiba last season

unemployed as a result of the lack of a more democratic and inclusive calendar. At the other end of the scale, the elite teams can play up to 85 games in the same season."

The solution would seem clear enough: longer state championships for the little teams, with the big teams entering in the closing stages, probably in a midweek-cup basis. Bom Senso have elaborated a calendar which would guarantee all clubs a minimum of 34 games a year.

This, however, does not seem to please the power structure of the Brazilian game. Power in Brazil's FA rests not with the clubs but with the state federations – whose prestige rests on their own local competition and who seem very reluctant to lose the presence of the giant clubs in the early stages.

The football authorities hardly seem disposed to take the players' proposals seriously. Instead, they have made efforts to portray Bom Senso as a movement restricted to the elite. It is true that the leading figures are big name players – Fenerbahce idol Alex, now back with Coritiba, has been especially active – but, wary of the accusation, Bom Senso has been very careful to include the interest of small clubs in its proposals.

Big match...Fluminense (left) and Flamengo in Rio state championship

Perhaps the bare truth is that, after playing in Europe for years, the likes of Alex are well aware of just how far Brazilian football is operating below its potential. They also have a better understanding of their industry than the people who run it. Moreover, having veteran players at the forefront of the movement makes good political sense; their careers are almost at an end so they need not fear reprisals from the power structure.

The scene is set, then, for conflict. If the Brazilian FA is unwilling to enter into a serious dialogue with Bom Senso there is a real chance of a players strike in Brazil – a scenario no one could have predicted a couple of years ago. WS

PADDY AGNEW
in Rome

Juve close in another title

Wins over Torino and Milan set champions on course for *Scudetto*

On or off the field, it is hard to avoid Juventus. By the beginning of March they appeared to have the Serie A title wrapped up, with an 11-point lead over second-place Roma and 17 points on Napoli in third.

For Juve's closest rivals, break point may have come with the Turin derby and an away game with Milan.

Emblematic was Juve's 2-0 victory in the San Siro. For 43 minutes of the first half, Milan gave their best performance of the season, taking the game to their below-par visitors. The home side had chances through Kaka, Andrea Poli, Riccardo Montolivo and Giampaolo Pazzini but failed to score. Then, in the 44th minute, in a rare venture into Milan's half, Carlos Tevez and Stephan Lichtsteiner set up Fernando Llorente for a superb goal that turned the match on its head.

Under the inspiration of promising new Dutch coach Clarence Seedorf, Milan had given it their best shot but Juventus simply rode out the storm and then made the hosts pay dearly for having failed to take their chances. Juve rubbed salt in the wound in the second half with a goal from the edge of the area by their man of the year, Tevez.

Anti-Juventus camp

A week earlier, the nationwide anti-Juventus camp – and there are plenty of them in Italy – had hoped that their neighbours Torino might call a halt to the champions' gallop.

The Turin derby is always a difficult game for Juventus since, for Torino, a victory over their much-lauded city rivals can save the season, even when all else is going wrong. Yet not that much has gone wrong for Giampiero Ventura's side this season. Inspired by the attacking talents that are Alessio Cerci and Ciro Immobile, Torino went into the *Derby della Mole* sitting joint sixth in the table, along with Parma and Verona.

But any thoughts that they might give Juve problems lasted just half hour – until Tevez struck the winning goal. After that, fortune smiled broadly on Juventus when referee Nicola Rizzoli failed to award a second-half penalty to Torino for a foul by Andrea Pirlo on Belgian midfielder Omar El Kaddouri.

Even if controversial refereeing decisions in favour of Juventus will always prompt some to point to potential "conspiracy" theories, the reality is that they are simply just too good for their Italian rivals. If, on top of that, referees make mistakes and sides such as Milan fail to take their chances, then the title looks a forgone conclusion.

Which is more than national coach Cesare Prandelli can say about his side's prospects in Brazil this summer.

Assessing Italy's friendlies is always an unreliable business but the ease with which they were given the run-around by Spain in a 1-0 defeat in Madrid does not bode well. However, it was the build-up to the game that attracted most of the attention, with Prandelli having to explain why he had called up one player, Giorgio Chiellini of Juventus, and not another, Daniele De Rossi of Roma.

Chiellini did not played in Juve's 2-0 victory over Milan as he was on his way back from injury and his club were therefore annoyed when he was summoned for international duty – even though they did admit he was probably fit to play. In the end, Prandelli took the diplomatic way out and did not play him.

De Rossi, meanwhile, was ruled out of the squad for having infringed Prandelli's "code of ethics" in relation to violent play or behaviour after he swung a fist at Internazionale's Mauro Icardi during their goalless draw. Even though the referee had failed to spot the foul, it had enjoyed extensive TV replays.

By leaving out De Rossi before the Italian federation had even handed the midfielder his three-match ban, Prandelli demonstrated that he is very much his own man. **WS**

In the thick of it...Juventus' player of the season so far, Tevez (on ground) causes problems for Milan in their clash at the San Siro

SID LOWE
in Madrid

End of an era at Camp Nou

Puyol will depart Barcelona at the end of the season

Respect...Puyol's leadership and loyalty was appreciated by fans other than those of Barcelona

In the end, the injuries were just too much. Carles Puyol has announced that he will leave Barcelona when the season comes to a close after the 38th injury of his career proved harder to overcome than anticipated. While it may not be the end of his entire career, June 30 will be his last day as a Barcelona player.

In June last year Puyol had a cyst removed from his knee. He has admitted he has not been able to perform at the level he demands of himself. At the end of the season he will stop and take a decision on his future. Possibilities include MLS, where former team-mate Thierry Henry is currently playing.

End of an era

Puyol's departure increases the sense of this being the end of an era for Barca, with Victor Valdes having already announced his intention to leave in the summer, with France or England as potential destinations. And although Xavi has denied suggestions that he too will leave, he is 34 and the rumours persist.

Puyol, Valdes and Xavi are all Catalans who came through the youth system, leading the most successful generation in history. But none was a leader quite like Puyol, though. Intense, serious and utterly dedicated, even in announcing his decision to depart he was direct and to the point; there were no thrills.

"After the last two operations, which were so invasive, I am struggling to recover the level that I demand of myself to continue here – more than I expected and more than the surgeons told me. That is why I have taken this decision," Puyol said during a short and unexpected press conference that lasted barely two minutes.

"I do not know what I will do, but what I do know for sure is that when the season ends I need to rest. I have not stopped for four seasons because of injuries. After that, we'll see."

Puyol was swift to insist that his career at Camp Nou has not finished yet. There are still three months left of the season and Puyol, who will be 36 in April, insisted: "Those who know me know that I will not let down my guard and they know that I will continue fighting to the end to try to improve and help the team win titles."

His Spain career ended on 100 games and he is just a handful of appearances short of 600 games for the club. Only Xavi has ever played more.

Team-mate Cesc Fabregas has said that he is determined to help Barcelona win something this season so that Puyol can add to his medal collection and depart "as he deserves". Andres Iniesta says of Puyol that "no one could ever represent more than him", while former club centre-back Abelardo called him the "most important defender in the club's history".

There was praise too from outside the club. Puyol is admired across the spectrum in Spain because he is always respectful, honest and wholehearted. One measure is that Real Madrid supporters have not got a bad word to say about him. "He was a real pain as a defender," said the Brazilian forward Ronaldo. "He never let up and always came back for more. But he was always noble, honest.

"Puyol dignified the game." WS

PUYOL'S MEDAL HAUL

World Cup	●
European Championship	●
La Liga	●●●●●●
Spanish Cup	●●
Spanish Super Cup	●●●●●●
Champions League	●●●
UEFA Super Cup	●
Club World Cup	●●

SPAIN SAYS 'THANK YOU'

The Spanish media paid warm tribute to Barcelona defender Carles Puyol following his announcement that he was going to leave the club at the end of this season.

***El 9* said that the 35-year-old was "an example to follow", while *Mundo Deportivo* called him the "eternal captain".**

STEVE MENARY
in St John's

Where did the money go?

Antiguan football remains beset by problems 14 years after a FIFA funding scandal

It was only recently that Antiguan football seemed on the up. The Caribbean island with a population of just 100,000 reached the penultimate round of the region's 2014 World Cup qualifiers, hosted the finals of the 2012 Caribbean Cup and entered a team in the USL Pro league, which is the third tier of the game in the USA.

Players such as Reading midfielder Mikele Leigertwood opted to play internationally for the islands of their parents as Antigua & Barbuda crept onto the radar of the big professional clubs. And since 2012 coaches from Bolton Wanderers, Sunderland, Tottenham Hotspur and New York Red Bulls have all visited.

Enthusiasm for the game was evident in the latest round of the You Challenge Series Cup at the AUA College of Medicine in Jabberwock, where Jack Day was the third Stoke City coach to visit Antigua in the past 12 months. This spring, Kenneth Goalburn will be the latest Antiguan youngster to travel to England for trials with the Premier League club.

Woeful...proper facilities for youngsters to learn the game are sadly lacking on the island

The Antigua & Barbuda Football Association (ABFA) runs programmes for players aged 12 and above but nothing younger. "We start playing football from here," says Milton "Nesta" Byfield, indicating the height of his knee, before moving his hand up to his waist. "And if we don't start until here, we have a problem."

Byfield works on the Generation Next programme, which stepped into the vacuum and brought over the professional clubs. The children, however, still play on woeful pitches.

"The facilities are atrocious," says Tom Curtis, the Englishman who coached Antigua in the World Cup qualifiers. "They need a 4G pitch and someone trustworthy to run it.

"Anyone with the key to a sports facility on the island is the most powerful person on Antigua."

Centre unbuilt

Antigua should have an artificial pitch, but in one of the worst scandals to come out of FIFA's Goal programme, a proposed technical centre at Paynters remains unbuilt despite the world body committing more than US$1.3million in funds since 2000.

When funds began to disappear the ABFA secretary Paul "Chet" Greene subsequently left. But his reputation is seemingly undamaged and he is now head of Antigua's National Olympic Committee and a Labour Party candidate in this year's elections.

A new executive took power, led by Mervyn Richards, but the Goal project failed to progress. When ABFA elections were held again in 2012, ex-international skipper and radio show host Veron "Epilus" Edwards stood against Everton "Batow" Gonsalves for the presidency.

Edwards, who co-runs Generation Next with Ricky Santos, opposed using ABFA funds for the island's USL side, Antigua Barracuda, but the ballot descended into farce. On election night, Edwards was disqualified as the ABFA cited FIFA statutes barring candidates with a criminal conviction – even though he was only involved in an ongoing court case which he subsequently won.

FIFA ordered a re-run and this time, Gonsalves won by 27 votes to 25, aided by four clubs – Ambassadors, Attacking Saints, Blackburn and a ladies' side – that Edwards claims had not played for four years. Ambassadors have still not played.

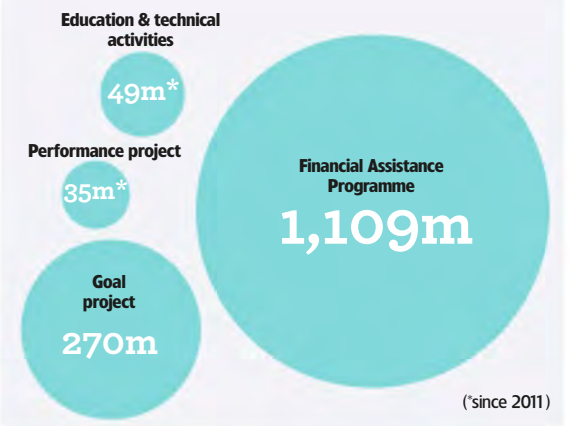
The fallout has split Antiguan football, with the ABFA having no involvement in Generation Next, and former international team-mates Edwards and Gonsalves barely speak. "We say 'hello" if we see each other but nothing more," says a disillusioned Edwards, who does not expect to run again in 2017.

"A lot of people that run these clubs are worse. In the campaigning, I was always approached by people looking for jobs and money."

Money is certainly in short supply in Antiguan football. Earlier this year, the island's referees threatened to strike unless EC$49,770 (Eastern Caribbean Dollars, which equals US$18,415) in overdue match fees were paid. The Barracuda side also proved a brave but

FIFA'S FINANCIAL SUPPORT SINCE 1999

Money given to member associations and confederations (in US$)



(*since 2011)

expensive gamble that lacked support.

"The Barracuda was great for the island players to play in a pro league. We wouldn't have done as well as we did in the World Cup," says Curtis. "But people didn't get behind it. We got 8,000 for our first game with the LA Blues. By the end of the first season we had next to no one."

Teams entering the USL have to pay a bond that insiders suggest is between US$50,000 and US$100,000, and non-refundable if a team quits before

> "The long-term goal is to find a player, but in the short term it's to develop the kids" Stoke City coach Jack Day

their agreed term. Last season, Barracuda did not play a single fixture in Antigua, with every game taking place in the United States.

"That was an attempt to find a model that would work for the Barracuda and US-based teams," says USL director of communications Jay Preble. "The US-based teams provided subsidies for the Barracuda as well as housing."

The Barracuda fulfilled – and lost – all 24 fixtures in their third and final USL season, while the national team have not played competitively since the Caribbean Cup finals in December 2012.

Curtis, who is now back in the UK, says: "We came to the end of the World Cup programme and there were issues with players getting paid and accountability. It never seemed a sustainable programme. Sadly, I seem to have been proved right."

FIFA confirms it has provided the ABFA with US$974,462 towards the Goal project, which is an overgrown field surrounded by a yellow wall. To raise money, the ABFA put the site up as guarantee for a loan.

Funding withheld

FIFA is tightening the Goal audit trail and has stopped the US$250,000 a year the ABFA gets from its Financial Assistance Programme. Another US$400,000 in Goal funding has also been withheld until the situation regarding the Paynters site is resolved. A FIFA spokesperson says: "The matter is currently pending with the FIFA Disciplinary Committee."

The ABFA has responded by asking the government for spare land that can be used as a replacement guarantee for the money raised against the Paynters site, but no one from the federation was available for comment during *World Soccer*'s eight-day stay in Antigua.

In a subsequent statement, the ABFA would neither confirm nor deny Edwards' allegation that the association has a EC$3m overdraft but insisted work on the Goal project would resume soon.

The ABFA said: "The government has given us some assurance of assisting even more with some cost that we need to cover in order for the project to begin again as it stopped under the watch of the previous president and not Mr Gonsalves."

Fourteen years after FIFA funded the Goal project, a fresh start can't come soon enough for Antiguan football. WS

FIFA'S HANDOUTS

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

All 209 member associations and six confederations each receive an annual payment of US$250,000 and US$5.5million respectively from the FAP. This money is intended "to motivate and empower the associations and confederations to organise development programmes that meet their needs and strengthen football and its administration in the long term".

GOAL PROJECT

This project allows each member association "to receive funding for football development projects that respond to the special needs of their national associations". To date, it has provided support for over 500 development projects throughout the world.

Big match...Antigua & Barbuda (in yellow) take on the USA in a World Cup qualifier

In charge...Byfield trains the kids

Derelict...only gates and a yellow wall mark the site of the Paynters project

JOEL RICHARDS
in Buenos Aires

Campaign kicks off with hiring and firing

New bosses are among domestic league's early leaders

Down to earth...a 1-0 win for Boca Juniors (in blue) ended a perfect start to the season for Estudiantes

As the Primera Division's Torneo Final competition got under way, a stagnant pre-season transfer market has left club accountants fretting and new River Plate president Rodolfo D'Onofrio describing his team as being "financially in the fourth division".

With only modest amounts of money coming into the domestic game from sales such as Colon's Lucas to Flamengo in Brazil and Pablo Perez of Newell's Old Boys to Malaga in Spain, the government has had to approve another multi-million pound rescue package to stave off more players' union strikes.

And the situation is unlikely to get any better until a solution can be found to cure the violence that surrounds the game. Despite having proved ineffective in resolving the problem, the best that the Argentinian FA and the government can come up with is to continue to ban away fans, thereby leaving stadiums half empty.

> "River has to play Boca in Miami or China. This *clasico* can be played in many places and both clubs can gain much superior profits out of it"
>
> River Plate president Rodolfo D'Onofrio sees a way of making more money

Among the big changes since the Torneo Inicial ended in December was the departure of the league's longest-servicing coach, with Ricardo Gareca quitting Velez Sarsfield. He has been replaced by Jose Oscar Flores. Defending champions San Lorenzo welcomed Edgardo Bauza as coach after Juan Antonio Pizzi headed straight to Valencia on the back of his title win.

Bauza didn't get off to the best of starts, winning only two of his first four league games in charge, but at least it was a better introduction than the one afforded to the verbose and pugnacious Ricardo Caruso Lombardi, whose arrival at Quilmes was greeted with a large street banner proclaiming: "We don't want you and we don't need you."

Dismal six months

Colon were in chaos after a dismal six months in which they finished bottom of the table, were docked points by FIFA, saw their president resign and failed to pay their players' wages. They brought in a new coach, Diego Osella, and found themselves leading the table after four games. They share top spot with Godoy Cruz – who also have a new coach in Jorge Almiron – Estudiantes and San Lorenzo.

Estudiantes won their first three games, with 22-year-old striker Guido Carrillo contributing three goals, but the team still look to 38-year-old Juan Sebastian Veron to pull the strings in midfield. In week four, Veron came face-to-face with Boca Juniors' 35-year-old playmaker Juan Roman Riquelme, who was making his first start of the season after injury.

Although the appearance of the two veterans seems to support the argument that there is no middle class in the domestic game – it is just youngsters and players past their prime – there are exceptions. And, in a national squad full of European-based stars, two of those currently playing in Argentina are set to battle it out for a starting place in midfield at the World Cup.

Fernando Gago, who returned home for family reasons last year, is now back at Boca after an injury-mired spell at Velez, while former Valencia team-mate Ever Banega has arrived on loan at Newell's, where he teams up with Maxi Rodriguez and Gabriel Heinze.

One possible solution to the game's financial woes was supposed to have come from a deal that was signed between the football federation and the government in 2009 to dramatically increase income from TV revenue. Accounts were supposed to be tidied up and, in turn, the football on show was supposed to gradually improve. It was also, most importantly, free-to-air on national television; it was "*Futbol Para Todos*" (football for everyone).

Yet neither of these improvements have happened. And then there is the politics behind it all.

Translating the infectious atmosphere from the stadium to the screen is almost impossible, but broadcast quality has dipped and the political slant has bothered many viewers, with too much government propaganda, either at the half-time break or emblazoned along the bottom of the screen, blocking the view of throw-ins or corners.

A promised shake-up this season, both behind the scenes and in front of the camera, has yet to materialise. Marcelo Tinelli, a businessman and showman in equal measure who started out his successful career as a football TV commentator, entered into negotiations with the government to overhaul match-day television production. But whether there was a conflict of interest for the man who is vice-president of San Lorenzo being charged with the hiring and firing of journalists became a moot point. Discussions eventually fizzled out on the eve of the new campaign. WS

JOHN DUERDEN

Will a bigger finals mean more quality?

Next January's Asian Cup finals will involve 16 teams, but some want to see more

Collision course...China's Rong Hao (no23) battles to keep Iraq at bay during the crucial qualifier

Iraq, the Asian Cup winners in 2007, confirmed their place in next year's finals with a comfortable 3-1 victory over China in the United Arab Emirates. However, Zhang Xizhe's 73rd-minute penalty also booked China's spot in Australia as they sneaked ahead of Lebanon to claim a spot as the best third-placed team on goal difference.

China had gone into the game needing only a draw, and could even afford to lose as long as there was not a six-goal swing between them and Lebanon. In the end, it was five, although at one point, with China 3-0 down to a rampant Iraq and the Lebanon 5-1 up in Bangkok, it was seven.

If China had failed to progress it would have only served to intensify moves to expand the Asian Cup from 16 to 24 teams. Just as the organisers of the 2015 tournament were desperate for China to be there for off-the-field reasons, much of the AFC is equally keen, over the long term, to ensure that such major markets don't miss out.

The AFC is never averse to following in the footsteps of its UEFA cousin, and while the European Championship will definitely have 24 teams at the 2016 finals, the Asian proposal remains just that for now, although it is likely to be adopted in time for 2019. In the end, self-interest usually rules. Of the 46 full members, perhaps eight can be confident of qualifying for a 16-team tournament; the rest will look kindly on the move to make it that much easier.

The main concern, apart from the practical difficulties of hosting a 24-team tournament and finding a satisfactory first-round format, is one of quality. Japan and South Korea increasingly see the Asian Cup as not only worth winning in its own right, but as an important step to help the continental elite compete on the global stage. Adding eight teams is not going to make it stronger.

Others argue that opening up the competition will raise standards from the bottom up. Quality across the board has never really been a major selling point of the competition. At the 2011 tournament Uzbekistan were thrashed 6-0 by Australia in the semi-finals and traditional powerhouse Saudi Arabia crashed to a 5-0 defeat by Japan.

Potential fans

While individual self-interest is the driving force, the bigger picture is increasing the size and importance of a competition that has yet to really engage with four billion potential fans. "I am sure that the changes that happen will have a big impact in Asian football and will benefit our member associations," says AFC president Sheikh Salman.

The region's footballing strength is its sheer size and population but, unlike Europe, south-east Asia are much less likely to pay attention to a competition in which they are not invited. If more media, fans, broadcasters and sponsors engage with the AFC's flagship competition this, in theory at least, will benefit both its short and long-term prospects.

While the debate over whether to admit more teams will continue, all agree the present qualification system is unsatisfactory. Just as this year's expansion in the number of nations allowed to participate in the Asian Champions League, there was always going to be some opening up of Asian Cup qualification. At present, 20 teams take part in the qualifiers – although the top three from the previous edition are given automatic passes – leaving half the continent on the outside looking in. For some of those, there is the second-tier AFC Challenge Cup, to be held in the Maldives this May, providing the winners with a place in Australia.

> "We must market our product and generate income to sustain football across the continent"
>
> AFC president Sheikh Salman

If the proposal is ratified by the AFC's executive committee, there will be more changes with the roads to the World and Asian Cups merging. After the first preliminary stage of qualification for the World Cup, which involves the genuine minnows, eight groups will produce eight winners and four best second-placed teams that will go to the 2019 Asian Cup finals and the last round of qualification for Russia 2018. The rest will fight over the remaining spots for the Asian Cup.

While even Chinese fans can't deny the drama often involved in qualifying for a 16-team Asian Cup, they – and most fellow AFC members – would prefer a more certain route to the continent's flagship tournament. It's not set in stone yet but few would bet against it. WS

2015 ASIAN CUP

The 16 teams taking part in the finals, to be held in Australia from January 9 to 31, are:

Australia	South Korea
Bahrain	Oman
China	Qatar
Iran	Saudi Arabia
Iraq	United Arab Emirates
Japan	Uzbekistan
Jordan	plus, the winners of the
Kuwait	2014 AFC Challenge Cup
North Korea	

JAMES MONTAGUE
in Mitrovica

Milestone match after years in limbo

Haiti were the opponents as Kosovo played their first FIFA-approved international

Under black clouds and plumes of acrid yellow smoke, a group of young men in blue tracksuits are meeting each other on a football pitch for the first time. The players of the Kosovo national team run around the pitch of the decrepit stadium in Obilic – a poor, industrial town dominated by Kosovo's two largest power stations which, according to the World Bank, represent the "worst single-point source of pollution in Europe" – as a crowd of a few hundred look on.

In two days time the players are due to be involved in an important milestone in Kosovo's recent history. After years of politics, fighting, failure, fraught negotiation and, finally, a tentative agreement, Kosovo are about to play their first FIFA-approved match: a friendly against Haiti. "I feel great because we struggled to have this opportunity to show the world we have tradition in football," says Eroll Salihu, the general secretary of the Football Federation of Kosovo (FFK), as he watches the team train. "It will be the first step for recognition of football."

Since 2008 the FFK has been pushing for recognition by UEFA and FIFA, which has proved to be a politically explosive issue. Ever since the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, and the 1999 war in Kosovo, the region has been in political limbo. Despite being recognised by over 100 United Nations members, and 23 of the 28 European Union states, Kosovo remains unrecognised due largely to opposition from Russia and Serbia, who still view Kosovo as an intrinsic and historic part of the Serbian state.

Both war and the subsequent lack of political recognition has had a devastating effect on football in Kosovo. Hundreds of thousands of refugees fled the war 15 years ago, spreading its people across Europe, in Sweden, Norway, Belgium and Switzerland among others. Despite producing an inordinate amount of talent – Xherdan Shaqiri, Lorik Cana, Granit Xhaka, Valon Behrami and Adnan Januzaj were all either born in Kosovo or have Kosovar parents – with no recognised national team of their own, many of those players have represented the countries in which they settled. Most tellingly, Switzerland qualified for the 2014 World Cup at a canter with a core of Kosovar players.

Historic...Albert Bunjaku (in white) takes on Haiti

UEFA statutes

There seemed little chance that Kosovo would be recognised by UEFA after it changed its statutes to allow only UN members to join. But when, in 2012, Sepp Blatter backed calls for Kosovo to be allowed to play friendlies it reignited the issue, angering the Serbs and worrying the Swiss, who feared they may lose their best players if a Kosovo team was recognised.

Before Switzerland played Albania in a World Cup qualifier in October 2012, Salihu and FFK president Fadil Vokrri embarked on an audacious operation. Shaqiri, Xhaka, Behrami and others signed a petition calling for Kosovo to be allowed the right to play friendlies. The Switzerland-Albania meeting was a symbolic match as nine of the 22 players during that game had Kosovar roots.

But it wasn't until January this year that an agreement was reached with Serbia. Friendly matches could be played, but no Kosovo flag could be flown and no national anthem played. The issue now was which players to call up. Salihu decided not to call up any players who would be planning a trip to Brazil this summer. "We are football people," Salihu says of that decision. "They have the world championship so we have to take care for them and not just our own interests."

The Kosovar players that were chosen speak with Swedish, Norwegian and German accents. Among them were goalkeeper Samir Ujkani, who played for Albania in that match against Switzerland 18 months ago, Norway's Ardian Gashi and Switzerland striker Albert Bunjaku, who played in the 2010 World Cup finals.

All set...players at training before the Haiti game

"My parents were born here, I was born here, all my family was born here, so it was 100 per cent that I came here to play," says Bunjaku. So, how did he feel when he represented Switzerland? "I was six when I went to Switzerland," he recalls. "I am very grateful for what Switzerland did.

"When Ottmar Hitzfeld called me it was great. It was unbelievable. I can't explain with words. But this is my country. I see myself as Kosovan."

Although the coach Albert Bunjaki – who is no relation – chose a team of players from around Europe, the difficulty was building a team ethic. Trips were arranged to famous monuments and the house of a Kosovo war hero. Before the game Kosovo's prime minister and president both met the team. "These people fought for Kosovo just as we are fighting for Kosovo on the field," explains the coach. "We are warriors as well, just in a different way."

Of course, not everyone was happy that Kosovo were playing their first FIFA-approved friendly match, especially as the northern city of Mitrovica had

been chosen to host it.

Mitrovica remains a divided city where most of Kosovo's Serbian minority, which makes up five per cent of the population, still lives. A river bisects the city, with the Serbs in the north and Kosovar Albanians in the south. The bridge that links the two is guarded by a detachment of Italian Carabinieri. Crossing north the walls are covered in anti-EU graffiti. Serbian flags fly from most buildings. The Serbian dinar is the currency of choice and the northern population vote in Serbian elections.

Partizan Kosovska Mitrovica

A few miles north of the bridge, Igor Uljarevic is standing on the pitch of a dishevelled, covered training complex. Electrical wires hang down on to the pitch as rain falls through the tears in the fabric. The 35-year-old is a coach and striker for Partizan Kosovska Mitrovica, who play in the Serbian fourth tier.

Before the war they used to play in what is now known as the Adem Jashari Stadium in the south, where Kosovo's first match is due to be played in a few hours time. But no one goes south any more. "We don't care about it," Uljarevic explains. "We have our side, our team. We don't care about the game and no one will watch the game. [It's a] Provocation and we don't support that.

"We don't want to know anything about that match."

The issue of Kosovo's Serbs had been a vexing one for the FFK. They had hoped to call up a Kosovar Serb player to the team but that was a bridge too far. "If a Serbian plays in that, the [Kosovo] team has all the support of Europe," says Uljarevic, who believes the move was a PR exercise. "They can say look 'we have Serbian players here, we saw it on television that Serbian players play in Kosovo.' But that is not good for us."

Political...Kosovo prime minister Hashim Thaci

> "We have waited all of our lives for this game. We have seen history today"
> Mohamed Vokrri, a Kosovo supporter who queued for hours to get a ticket for the match in Mitrovica

As kick-off approached in Mitrovica, the roads leading to the stadium were full of flags and song; flags of Kosovo, Albania, the USA – a country still wildly popular and seen as saviours of the fledgling Kosovar nation – and the European Union. But, inside, the Kosovars were good to their word. On the stadium's flagpoles flew the standards of opponents Haiti and FIFA, but nothing from Kosovo.

The stands, though, were full of flags from every corner of Kosovo. Some anti-Serbian chanting could be heard as well, but no national anthem was sung. More than 17,000 people jammed into the stadium as the rain fell on the uncovered crowds. The match would end in a 0-0 draw, played on an awful, waterlogged pitch. As might be expected from a team co-coached by former England assistant Tord Grip, Kosovo's defence was watertight.

Salihu, the FFK and the Kosovo nation hope that the match will be the first of many. They hope they will be recognised by UEFA and FIFA in time to begin qualification for the 2018 World Cup finals in Russia, the country providing the main obstacle to Kosovo's political recognition in the UN Security Council.

Kosovo's football fans may well have waited a lifetime for their first FIFA approved match, but recognition will require more patience yet. WS

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100 Most Wanted...

Nick Bidwell, Gavin Hamilton and Tim Vickery assess the players who will be targeted by Europe's big spenders this summer

The World Cup is likely to have little bearing on this summer's European transfer activity. Instead, the direction of the market will be dictated by the deals of a handful of "superclubs". Their plans for summer 2014 are already well-advanced and will directly affect the transfer business of those below them in the food chain.

Chelsea's search for a striker; Manchester United's willingness to back manager David Moyes with serious money; Paris Saint-Germain's ongoing attempts to spend their way to Europe's top table. All of these will be important factors that will impact on the rest of the market.

Similarly, the desire of Real Madrid president Florentino Perez, to sign a world-class superstar every summer will dominate headlines in Spain.

Plenty of deals will be dependent on other transfers taking place further down the line. The departure of Victor Valdes from Barcelona has opened one such chain and it is highly likely that Valdes will be replaced at Barca by Marc-Andre Ter Stegen, whose place at Borussia Monchengladbach is set to be filled by Yann Sommer of Basle.

Few deals will take place in isolation.

Done deals

The big-name transfers that have already been signed off

Robert LEWANDOWSKI
B Dortmund (Ger) to Bayern Munich (Ger)

Although only announced officially at the turn of the year, Bayern's deal to bring in Dortmund's prolific Polish striker effectively has been in place since April 2013. He will become the first Bayern player ever to have a five-year contract, worth €9m per season.

Alen HALILOVIC
Dinamo Zagreb (Cro) to Barcelona (Spa)

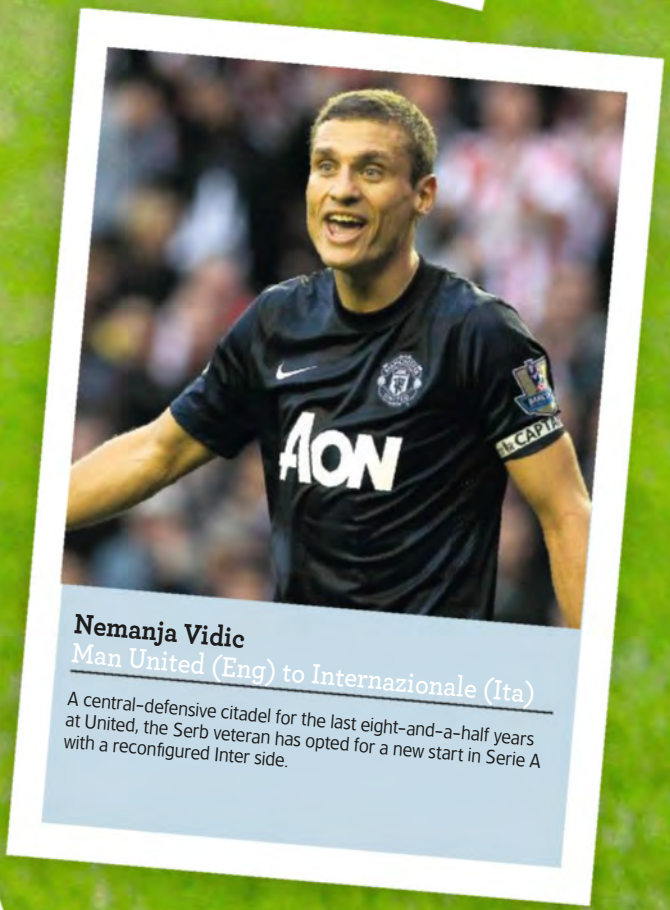
After monitoring the Croat attacking midfield prodigy for the best part of four years, Barca have finally taken the plunge, splashing out €10m for the teenager.

Sidney SAM
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) to Schalke (Ger)

In the best form of his career, the international winger will be with Schalke next term after they took advantage of a cut-price €2.5m release clause.

Kurt ZOUMA
Saint-Etienne (Fra) to Chelsea (Eng)

A key member of the France Under-20 side that claimed the world title last year, the powerful centre-back agreed a €14.6m deal in January.



Nemanja Vidic
Man United (Eng) to Internazionale (Ita)

A central-defensive citadel for the last eight-and-a-half years at United, the Serb veteran has opted for a new start in Serie A with a reconfigured Inter side.

Bright young things

The game's most sought-after new talent

Eliaquim MANGALA
(Porto, Por)

Three years after leaving Standard Liege for €6.5m, the outstanding French centre-back is likely to cost Manchester City or Paris Saint-Germain around seven times as much in the close season.

Julian DRAXLER
(Schalke, Ger)

German footballing icon Lothar Matthaus has advised the attacking midfielder to join Bayern Munich and a €45m move is very much in the air at the moment.

Everton RIBEIRO
(Cruzeiro, Bra)

Voted the best player in the Brazilian championship last year, the right-winger fits the bill for a number of European sides, namely Liverpool, Atletico Madrid and Shakhtar Donetsk.

Roberto FIRMINO
(Hoffenheim, Ger)

If Schalke lose wunderkind Draxler, their intention is to turn to Hoffenheim's 22-year-old, who also is a target for Russian, Spanish, Italian and English sides.

Joel VELTMAN
(Ajax, Hol)

Ajax technical director Marc Overmars swears he will not relinquish the central defender; clubs in England and Italy think otherwise.

Luciano VIETTO
(Racing, Arg)

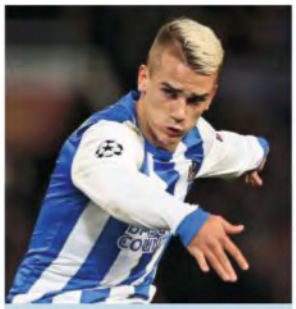
Represented by Diego Maradona's old agent, Jorge Cysterpiller, the forward is often likened to Sergio Aguero and counts Real Madrid, Liverpool and Marseille among his growing band of admirers.

Martin HINTEREGGER
(Salzburg, Aut)

Liverpool, Internazionale and Barcelona have all been heavily linked with the centre-back.

William CARVALHO
(Sporting Lisbon, Por)

The midfielder has been the revelation of the season in Portugal, and Europe's biggest clubs are circling.



Antoine GRIEZMANN
(Real Sociedad, Spa)

A subject of fascination for Paris Saint-Germain, Real Madrid, Barcelona and several top English sides, the French dribbler and goalscorer is currently on his farewell tour in La Liga.

Remy CABELLA
(Montpellier, Fra)

The attacking midfielder has been told he can leave at the end of the season if an offer in the region of €12-15m is put on the table by a Premier League club.

Alberto MORENO
(Sevilla, Spa)

The Spain Under-21 left-back is one of the most sought-after players in Europe, attracting admiring glances from Real and Atletico Madrid, Manchester City and Napoli.

Luke SHAW
(Southampton, Eng)

The 18-year-old left-back's recent England debut has increased the likelihood that he will join Chelsea, Manchester United or Manchester City.

Andre HAHN
(Augsburg, Ger)

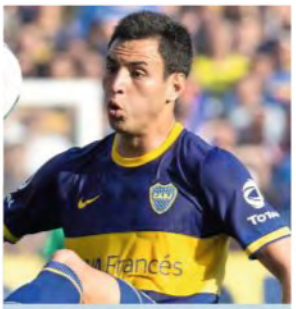
Recently called up to the Germany squad, the goal-hungry right-winger has been a revelation this term and is tipped to figure prominently on Borussia Dortmund's wish-list.

Heading to Europe

South Americans on their way over

Angel CORREA
San Lorenzo (Arg)

Quick, stocky, two-footed support striker who has been compared by his club to Sergio Aguero and Carlos Tevez.



Juan SANCHEZ MINO
Boca Juniors (Arg)

Classy wide or central midfielder with a sweet left foot and plenty of lung power. International who can also play at left-back.

Rodrigo DE PAUL
Racing (Arg)

Tall, elegant attacking midfielder used wide on the left, which allows him to cut inside and unleash his right-foot shots.

LUAN
Gremio (Bra)

Lanky support striker who has made a big impression in this, his debut year, and is already attracting European interest.

WENDELL
Gremio (Bra)

Left-back who has no sooner replaced Alex Telles – who was sold to Galatasaray – that he is being lined up for a move himself: to Bayer Leverkusen.

DORIA
Botafogo (Bra)

Big, left-footed centre-back who is only 19 but has already been capped at senior level.

Eder ALVAREZ BALANTA
River Plate (Arg)

Classy and combative left-footed centre-back, already capped by Colombia and surely bound for a rapid move.

Giorgian DE ARRASCAETA
Defensor (Uru)

Technically gifted attacking midfielder, a star of last year's World Under-20 Cup who is consolidating himself at club level.

Jonathan RODRIGUEZ
Penarol (Uru)

Quick, stocky striker who came to prominence with a man-of-the-match performance in his first derby against Nacional.

Fernando GAIBOR
Emelec (Ecu)

Dynamic central midfielder, an Under-20 product who has successfully graduated to Ecuador's senior squad.

Classy...Alvarez Balanta

Left-field moves

The summer market can provide some surprises

PEDRO
(Barcelona, Spa)

Aware that he has been displaced to the left wing by Neymar, PSG and most of the Premier League have calculators at the ready for an assault.

DANTE
(Bayern Munich, Ger)

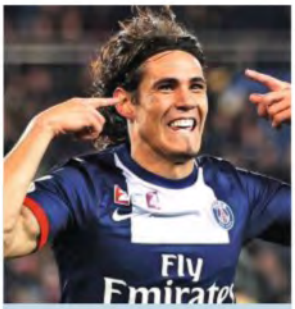
As Bayern's most influential defender, the Brazilian centre-back is worth his weight in gold to the Bavarians, but Real Madrid and Manchester United are hovering in the shadows.

Marco VERRATTI
(Paris S-G, Fra)

Under contract until 2018, the young Italian midfielder insists he is happy at the Parc des Princes, but he could be tempted to link up with his old mentor Carlo Ancelotti at Real Madrid.

Thomas MULLER
(Bayern Munich, Ger)

It will take some doing to persuade the attacker to quit Bayern but, according to *Bild*, Real Madrid president Florentino Perez thinks €40-50m might do the trick.



Edinson CAVANI
(Paris S-G, Fra)

Despite settling in well at PSG this season, the Uruguayan star striker has a major gripe: the unfamiliar right-flank role given to him by coach Laurent Blanc.

Robin VAN PERSIE
(Man United, Eng)

Frustrated with United's disastrous season and not exactly impressed with coach David Moyes' tactical approach, the Dutch striker might well decide that two campaigns at Old Trafford is enough.

Paul POGBA
(Juventus, Ita)

The up-and-coming midfielder is a priority for Paris Saint-Germain, who are reportedly willing to offer him a mouth-watering leap in salary, from around €1.5m per season to €7m.

Eden HAZARD
(Chelsea, Eng)

The word in the French capital is that PSG owner Nasser Al Khelaifi will do whatever it takes to land the Belgian midfielder, offering a fee of up to €80m and doubling his current wages.

The dash

A big pay packet is

Diego COSTA
(Atletico Madrid, Spa)

He might have doubled his wages on signing a three-year contract extension last August, but he knows there are richer pickings to be had in the Premier League.

Ezequiel GARAY
(Benfica, Por)

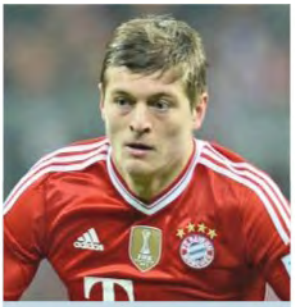
A rare example of a Real Madrid reject who does not subsequently go into career free-fall, the Argentinian centre-back is mulling over a Zenit employment package that would double his salary.

Ilkay GUNDOGAN
(Bor Dortmund, Ger)

Despite being sidelined all season with a complex back condition, the defensive midfielder remains on the shopping list of a swathe of Champions League participants in Spain and England.

for cash

always tempting



Toni KROOS
(Bayern Munich, Ger)

Taking something of a risk, the Bayern hierarchy are resisting the midfielder's demand for a 100 per cent pay rise. Manchester United may be able to help him.

Arturo VIDAL
(Juventus, Ita)

Already earning €5.5m a year after striking a new deal in December, the in-demand Chilean could earn even more should Paris Saint-Germain or Real Madrid come up with a transfer fee to melt the heart of the Turin club's accountants.

Miralem PJANIC
(Roma, Ita)

According to *Gazzetta dello Sport* quite a chasm exists between what Roma are prepared to pay the Bosnian playmaker in new contract talks (€2.4 a year) and the €4m that Paris Saint-Germain are prepared to put on the table.

Yevhen KONOPLYANKA
(Dnipro, Ukr)

Liverpool were close to doing a deal for the winger in January, but could not agree a price. They will be back again this summer.

One last pay day

A move is always handy at the end of a career

Jeremie ALIADIERE
(Lorient, Fra)

Back in the attacking groove following a long spell in the English wilderness, he almost went to Marseille in January and is on the radar of several other Ligue 1 sides.

Juan ARANGO
(Bor M'gladbach, Ger)

After five seasons with Borussia Monchenglbach in the Bundesliga, the 33-year-old creative Venezuelan midfielder is likely to leave for the Gulf.

Esteban CAMBIASSO
(Internazionale, Ita)

Out of contract after serving Inter loyally for 10 years, the Argentinian defensive midfielder will probably head home, with his old club River Plate at the front of the queue.

Patrice EVRA
(Man United, Eng)

The full-back's role in France's World Cup 2010 mutiny has rendered him a hate figure in his own land, but the rancour will not stop him signing for Paris Saint-Germain or Monaco.

Miroslav KLOSE
(Lazio, Ita)

On reaching the end of his contract in June, the evergreen German striker could cross the Atlantic for an MLS swansong or sign on the dotted line for first pro club, Kaiserslautern.

Jeremy MATHIEU
(Valencia, Spa)

Monaco and Barcelona are running the rule over the 30-year-old left-back.

Pepe REINA
(Liverpool, Eng)

On loan at Napoli from Liverpool, the Spain international keeper has not yet given up on his dream of returning to Barcelona and is even prepared to go there as back-up.

Juan Manuel VARGAS
(Fiorentina, Ita)

The irrepressible left-sided Peruvian is being measured up by certain elite clubs in Russia and may be tempted by the roubles on offer.

Bacary SAGNA
(Arsenal, Eng)

The 31-year-old right-back could leave on a Bosman this summer having so far turned down offers of a new deal in the hope of being given a three-year contract.

Philippe MEXES
(Milan, Ita)

A Serie A headliner for the past decade, the French libero has Monaco and a couple of Premier League outfits tracking him.

Ivica OLIC
(Wolfsburg, Ger)

Still running strongly at the age of 34, the Croat striker is available on a Bosman in the summer and has been linked with Premier League side Stoke City.

The new challenge

Some big names may seek fresh starts

Mario BALOTELLI
(Milan, Ita)

Tired of life at under-achieving Milan, the maverick front runner has been heard talking fondly of the Premier League, where he used to play for Manchester City.

Mats HUMMELS
(Bor Dortmund, Ger)

The Germany international centre-back's instincts tell him to stay true to Dortmund. But will he be immune to the pull of Barcelona ?

Radamel FALCAO
(Monaco, Fra)

A half-full Stade Louis II is not for "*El Tigre*". Real Madrid or Chelsea would be much more his style, provided, of course, they are willing to meet the €80-100m asking price.

Adrian RAMOS
(Hertha Berlin, Ger)

Both Borussia Dortmund and Atletico Madrid are reported to be sweet on the Colombian striker.

Douglas COSTA
(Shakhtar Donetsk, Ukr)

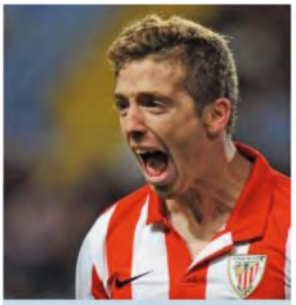
Although contractually tied to Shakhtar for another four years, the quicksilver Brazilian right-winger is reported to be plotting a move to Italy or England.

Jackson MARTINEZ
(Porto, Por)

The Colombian goal machine is ready to fly the Portuguese nest at the end of the season, with London his preferred destination.

Ivan RAKITIC
(Sevilla, Spa)

In the best goalscoring form of his career, the Croat schemer has Chelsea, Manchester United, Barcelona and Atletico Madrid drooling over him.



Iker MUNIAIN
(Athletic Bilbao, Spa)

With the exciting winger or second striker putting off new contract talks until the end of the season, many believe he wants out of San Mames. Premier League, anyone ?

ROMULO
(Fiorentina, Ita)

On loan at Verona this season, the versatile Brazilian has every chance of taking his skills to a higher plane next season. Juventus, Paris Saint-Germain and Milan are waiting to pounce.

HULK
(Zenit, Rus)

Izvestia in Moscow claims that the Brazilian centre-forward has had enough of St Petersburg. Could he be the man to fill the void if Falcao departs Monaco?

Mathieu VALBUENA
(Marseille, Fra)

The France wide-man is on record stating his desire to quit Marseille in May and he has assiduous followers in Spain, England and Italy.

Victor VALDES
(Barcelona, Spa)

Keen to experience another championship after spending his entire career with Barcelona, the Catalan keeper was thought to be heading to Monaco, though Manchester City are making up ground fast.

Axel WITSEL
(Zenit, Rus)

One of the unsung heroes of the rejuvenated Belgium national team, the controlling midfielder would not say no to a move to Atletico Madrid or the top-end of the Premier League.

Marc-Andre TER STEGEN
(Bor M'gladbach, Ger)

The Germany international is being lined up by Barcelona to replace the outgoing Valdes.

Yann SOMMER
(Basle, Swi)

The Swiss keeper is set to join Borussia Monchengladbach as a replacement for Ter Stegen.

Seeking more playing time

Sometimes a new club can resurrect a career

Alvaro MORATA
(Real Madrid, Spa)

With starts for his club side few and far between, the Spain Under 21 striker is fast losing patience and could well end up at Arsenal.

CASEMIRO
(Real Madrid, Spa)

Milan coach Clarence Seedorf is said to be interested in the Brazilian central midfielder.

Iker CASILLAS
(Real Madrid, Spa)

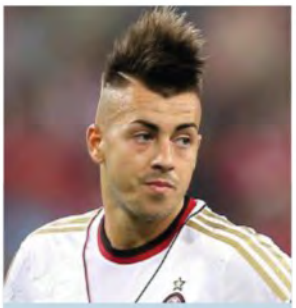
A diet of just Champions League and Spanish Cup games is not enough for Spain's goalkeeper and captain. Something will have to give.

ISCO
(Real Madrid, Spa)

Since arriving last summer, the attacking midfielder has found the competition for first-team places a little too hot. With PSG and Manchester City lurking, he may opt for a new dawn.

David LUIZ
(Chelsea, Eng)

Jose Mourinho clearly does not trust the Brazilian in the heart of his defence – but Barcelona have a different take on the matter.



Stephan EL SHAARAWY
(Milan, Ita)

After losing his first-team spot and breaking his foot, the Italo-Egyptian forward needs to build up a head of steam again.

Fabio COENTRAO
(Real Madrid, Spa)

Rarely used by coach Carlo Ancelotti, the Portuguese left-back and his "super agent" Jorge Mendes are not short of options, with Juventus, Milan, Napoli and Manchester United in position.

Adrien RABIOT
(Paris S-G, Fra)

How much longer will this stylish midfielder make do with the role of deluxe substitute? The arrival at PSG of Yohan Cabaye probably has pushed the teenager over the edge.

Lucas DIGNE
(Paris S-G, Fra)

A victim of the renaissance of PSG's Brazilian left-back Maxwell, the accomplished France Under-20 star must wonder if he did the right thing signing for the club in the close season.

Mamadou SAKHO
(Liverpool, Eng)

The France centre-back has the same problem that he did at old club, Paris Saint-Germain: third in the pecking order.

Xherdan SHAQIRI
(Bayern Munich, Ger)

Expressive, tricky and full of vitality, the Swiss winger deserves much more than a bit-part brief at Bayern.

Options...Coentrao

Off the wage bill

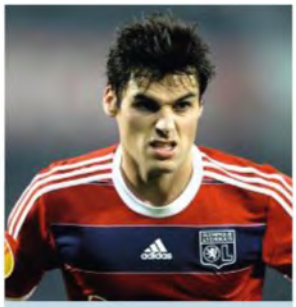
The big names who clubs are keen to get off their payroll

Dani ALVES
(Barcelona, Spa)

With homegrown youngster Martin Montoya knocking hard on the door, Barca's powers-that-be could make quite a killing by offloading the Brazilian right-back and his €7m salary.

Fernando TORRES
(Chelsea, Eng)

With the Spaniard rarely cutting the figure of a £175,000 a week striker, the time might have come to prune.



Yoann GOURCUFF
(Lyon, Fra)

Lyon are not the financial powerhouse of old and have to keep the money men happy with regular sales. They hope to fuel a bidding war for the inconsistent but incredibly talented playmaker.

Big earner...Gignac

Diego MILITO
(Internazionale, Ita)

In his last season under contract to Inter, the veteran Argentinian striker is the number one item on the Milan club's wage-bill, currently earning a whopping €5m a year.

Rafael VAN DER VAART
(Hamburg, Ger)

Hamburg's massive debts (around €100m) make budget cuts inevitable and as the club's top earner (€3.5 million a year), the veteran Dutch playmaker is on thin ice.

Mirko VUCINIC
(Juventus, Ita)

In order to free up €3m from the wage bill, Juventus are ready to listen to any reasonable offers for their adaptable Montenegrin attacker. Valencia, Arsenal and Internazionale are in the hunt.

Jermaine JONES
(Schalke, Ger)

Schalke have reached the conclusion that €4m a year is too big a price to pay for a midfielder always mired in controversy.

Salomon Kalou
(Lille, Fra)

With French football's financial police squad on their case at the moment, Lille badly need an injection of funds and have no option but to sell their star attacker.

Riccardo MONTOLIVO
(Milan, Ita)

Still cost-cutting with a vengeance, Milan would save €3.5m a year if their midfield ace and captain was to pack his bags. A golden opportunity for Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti.

Andre-Pierre GIGNAC
(Marseille, Fra)

Marseille never tire of counting the pennies these days and are trying to jettison the chunky striker and number one earner (€3.9m per season). Gignac, however, refuses to be press-ganged.

Surplus to requirements

The players who have found themselves out of favour

Alvaro ARBELOA
(Real Madrid, Spa)

With young gun Dani Carvajal breathing down his neck, the 31-year-old Spain international right-back will jump from Madrid before he is pushed.

Etienne CAPOUE
(Tottenham H, Eng)

The French midfielder only joined Spurs from Toulouse last summer but has struggled to hold down a first-team place under new manager Tim Sherwood.

Ashley COLE
(Chelsea, Eng)

Incredible how the England centurion has gone from automatic Chelsea starter to bench-warmer in Jose Mourinho's pecking order.

Samuel ETO'O
(Chelsea, Eng)

There's very little chance of an extension to the African marksman's one-year deal with Chelsea after Jose Mourinho cast doubt over his true age.

Erik LAMELA
(Tottenham H, Eng)

The Argentinian attacking misfit is determined to bring an end to his nightmarish 2013-14 at Spurs, and would love to return to Italy, where he used to star for Roma.

Mario MANDZUKIC
(Bayern Munich, Ger)

It's hard to imagine a player as proud as the Croat striker willingly playing second-fiddle to new Bayern point of attack, Robert Lewandowski.

NANI
(Man United, Eng)

Turin sports daily, Tuttosport report that United's Portuguese flank flyer has hired an Italian agent, perhaps paving the way for a switch to Juventus.

Javier PASTORE
(Paris S-G, Fra)

Audacious and skilful but also nonchalant and inconsistent, the skinny Argentinian attacker rarely has lived up to his €40m price-tag at PSG and will look to rebuild back in Italy.

Fabio QUAGLIARELLA
(Juventus, Ita)

The Juventus front-man has been frozen out by the "Old Lady", not even included in the club's Europa League squad. Lazio and a number of English top-flight clubs hope to take advantage.

Andrea RANOCCHIA
(Internazionale, Ita)

Once considered one of the great prospects of Italian football, the international central defender has fallen out of favour at Inter and may take the high road to Germany.

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PLAYER Biography

Diego Costa

The World Cup striker who chose Spain over Brazil. By Sid Lowe

In the summer of 2012, Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone told Diego Costa that he was not part of his plans for the coming season. It looked like the end of a career at the Estadio Vicente Calderon which had only just got started. Instead, it turned out to be the beginning.

Eighteen months on, Costa is Atletico's most important player. If he does leave this summer it will be as one of the most coveted strikers in the world – and in exchange for the €38million in his buyout clause.

"Costa is enormous in every way," Simeone says now. A case could be made for saying that he is the most important player not just at Atletico but in La Liga as he is the driving force behind their challenge to be the first team outside of the big two to win the title in over a decade.

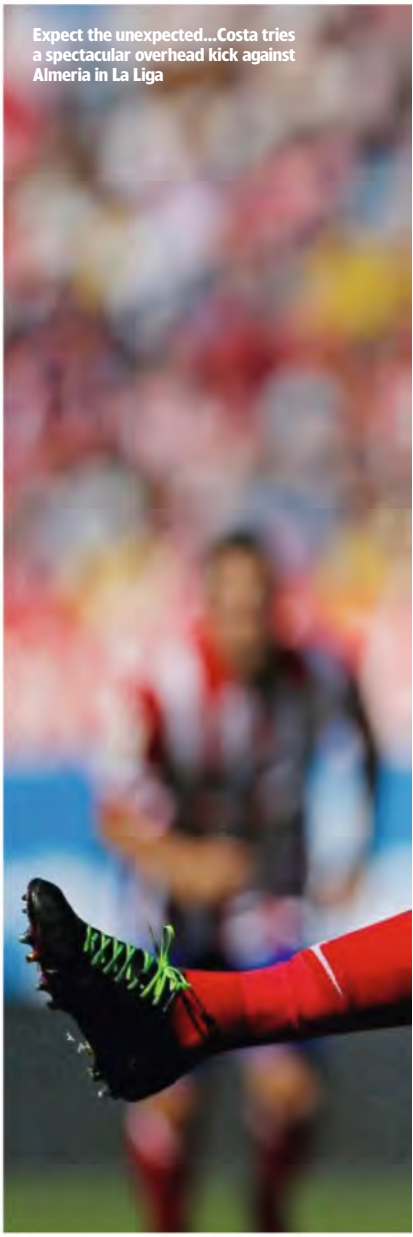
He had scored 21 goals by the start of March, with only Cristiano Ronaldo getting more in the league. Only two players have completed more dribbles than him, only one player has had more shots and no player has suffered more fouls. And if they foul him it is because they fear him. And opponents are right to fear him.

Costa is, after all, the player who is so good that the strongest two countries on the planet have fought over him: the world champions and World Cup hosts. You know you're doing something right when you're being courted by Spain and Brazil. And it says something about Costa's character that he chose Spain. This summer he will be a Brazilian in Spain's kit, playing in Brazil, with an entire nation against him. His nation.

Meandering career

It says much about Costa's character that he has got this far. In the summer of 2012 it did not look possible. Signed by Atletico in 2007 for €1.5m and went on to play for Braga, Celta Vigo, Albacete and Valladolid – hardly the biggest of clubs – on loan as his career seemed to be meandering. He did not know where it was heading and few expected it to take him where it has this year.

He finally got his chance with Atletico in the 2010-11 season and played 28 league games, but a knee ligament injury the following summer left him without a ▸

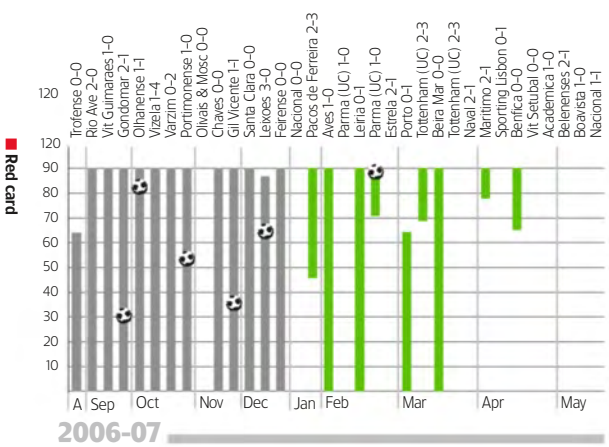


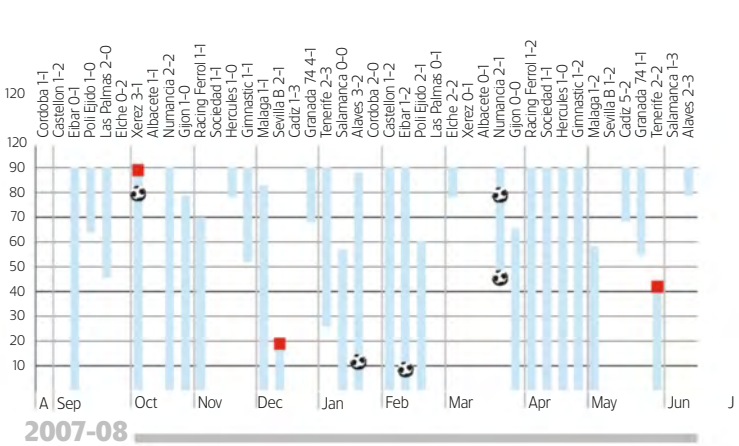
Expect the unexpected...Costa tries a spectacular overhead kick against Almeria in La Liga

TIMELINE: EVERY MATCH, EVERY MINUTE, EVERY GOAL

Penafiel · Braga · Celta Vigo · Albacete · Valladolid · Atletico Madrid · Rayo Vallecano · Brazil · Spain

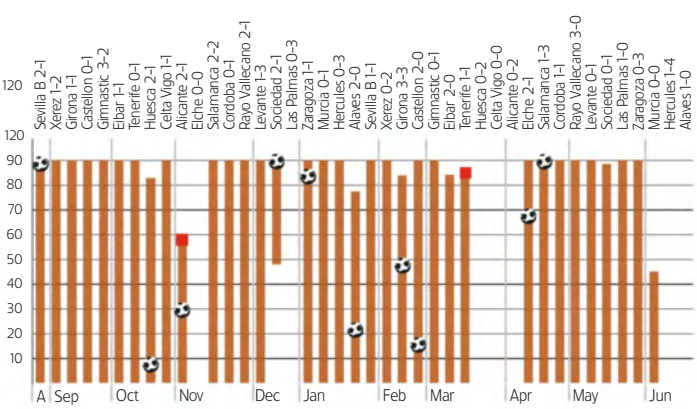
CL UEFA Champions League · **UC** UEFA Cup/Europa League · **USC** UEFA Super Cup · **SC** Spanish Cup · **SSC** Spanish Super Cup



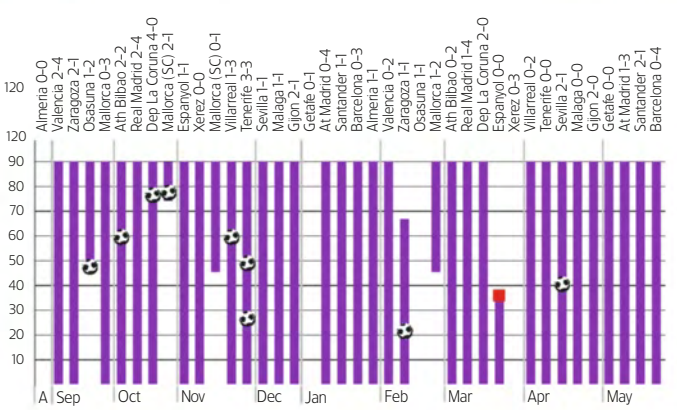


Sep 13, 2009 – makes his debut for Valladolid at home to Valencia.

May 16, 2010 – his season with Valladolid ends with defeat away to Barcelona before he rejoins Atletico.



2008-09



2009-10

New recruit...joining Atletico in 2007

FACT FILE

Diego da Silva Costa

Nationality Brazilian

Age 25 (07.10.88)

Place of birth Lagarto, Sergipe, Brazil

Height 6ft 2in (1.88m)

Position Forward

Teams
Penafiel (2006) 13 games/5 goals**
Atletico Madrid (2007–2009) 0 games/0 goals
Braga (2007) 9 games/1 goal**
Celta Vigo (2007-08) 30 games/5 goals**
Albacete (2008-09) 35 games/9 goals**
Valladolid (2009-10) 36 games/9 goals
Rayo Vallecano (2012) 16 games/10 goals
Atletico Madrid (2010-present) 121 games/55 goals*
Brazil (2013) 2 games/0 goals
Spain (2014) 1 game/0 goals

Honours
Atletico Madrid
UEFA Super Cup 2010, 2012; Spanish Cup 2013

(up to and inc 02.03.14)*
*(** does not include domestic cup games)*

place in the squad. It did not help that he did not have a European passport: Atletico's three non-EU players were Radamel Falcao, Joao Miranda and Eduardo Salvio. So, fit again, he embarked on another loan spell midway through the season, this time across town at Rayo Vallecano.

Things went well in Vallecas. Costa scored nine times in 16 games and his coach, Jose Ramon Sandoval, described him as "the best striker in the world for what I want to do". But if Costa thought that would reopen the door at Atletico, he was in for a surprise.

Simeone, starting his first full season in charge, had been impressed with what he saw and Costa's approach dovetailed with his own. But the coach already had Falcao, Costa still did not have a Spanish passport and Adrian, a player for whom Simeone said he had a special weakness, would be his other striker.

Simeone called Costa before pre-season training and told him: "You're probably not going to play much but we will train you as if you were going to play." That, it seemed, was that. But then Salvio left for Benfica and Costa took advantage. Simeone remembers the summer sessions and laughs: "I wanted to kill him. He was doing these amazing diagonal movements. He was flying, absolutely flying."

Simeone saw a player in his own image: tough, aggressive, determined, clever, tactically astute, streetwise – and began to realise what a difference he could make. Simeone said: "I told him, 'Your characteristics suit our play. I do not have any commitment to specific players: what I want is to win'." Bit by bit Costa became part of the side, eventually playing 31 games and scoring 10 goals.

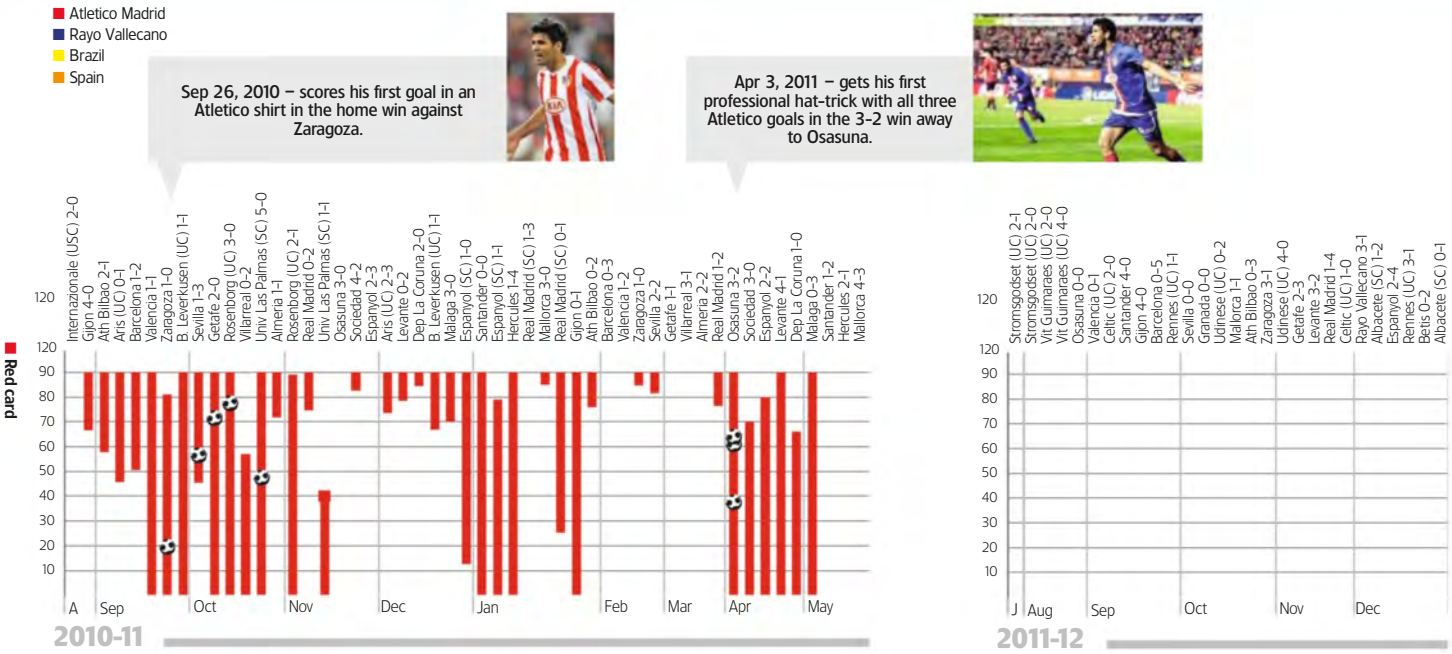
In fact, the change that has been talked about this season had begun at the back end of last term. Costa scored 12 goals in all competitions from December 2012 onwards, compared to just three before that. Among those goals was the opener in the Spanish Cup Final against Real Madrid. Then this season he really did start flying.

By the start of October he had already equalled his best-ever season's total. Two against Celta Vigo took him to 10, including the only goal against Real Madrid, the same number as in the whole of last season. Before that he had scored nine, six, seven, nine and five in the league – and two of those seasons were in the second division.

Costa had already started to take on responsibility before Falcao departed, having previously aided the Colombian more than scoring himself. After Falcao's departure he became the central figure, and even the signing of David Villa did not make his role an auxiliary one.

Apart from the technical ability and

Travelling man...on loan at Rayo Vallecano, taking on Real Madrid's Pepe (left) and Alvaro Arbeloa



the basic talent, what is most striking about Costa is his movement. He draws defenders out, dropping deeper or towards the wings. He is adept at almost "hiding" from his markers and then reappearing. As he admits: "I am not as effective when I am static." So he is always on the move. His great strength is breaking beyond the defence, timing it to reach that at speed and onside.

Simeone says: "His ability to make vertical runs into space and go on those diagonals is so good that it would be a crime not to play him in."

The goals came and his contribution was consistent, not the product of the occasional glut. Those 21 league goals came in 16 different games.

New contract

"I like the responsibility," Costa told *El Pais* in the summer. He also said at last he had "tranquillity". Liverpool were among the clubs reportedly interested, but Costa signed a new contract. For the first time he knew where he would be playing that season. He was settled. He was maturing and learning too.

On one level that sounds surprising. Look at Costa's travels – Braga and Penafiel in Portugal then Atletico, Braga again, Celta, Albacete, Valladolid, Atletico, Vallecano, Atletico – and it feels he has been round for a long time. His physique and his face tell you the same. Yet at the start of this season he was only 24.

He was signed by Atletico, "virtually off the streets" in the words of the club's former sporting director, and had played little organised football. Now, with over 250 appearances, he has evolved and come to understand the game better. Those movements have become more varied, more subtle.

Costa may not always look smooth or especially aesthetic. When he runs at people he sometimes appears to be bundling through, not entirely in control. Yet it works so often that this is no fluke. Defenders bounce off him, unable to knock him off his stride, but he is not all about brute strength. The balance is impressive: when the ball gets left behind, few adjust their feet so fast or so effectively. When he gets going he is hard to stop and when he gets through, his finishing is effective.

Atletico's physical trainer Oscar "*El Profe*" Ortega says: "There are things about him that are illogical. He comes off a serious knee injury, goes to Rayo and scores goals even though he had very little physical work under his belt. That tells you he is different, a great physical specimen.

"He was incredible in that first pre-season. I asked him what work he had done as a youth player and he said none. He played in the street. We have to look after his knee and his ankle, but there are no limits."

Ortega reveals one of the keys behind Costa's game: there is something unrefined, something still quite raw, about him; something that still says street footballer. Above all, it is his attitude. There is a relentlessness about him that has rubbed a lot of people up the

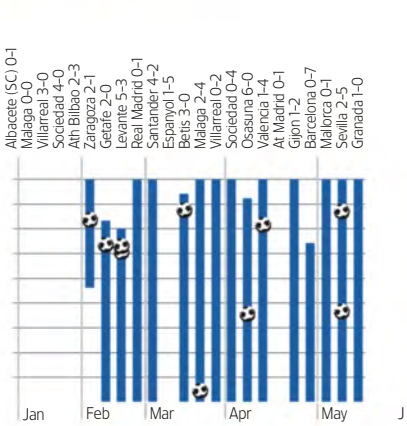
Finishing prowess...scoring Atletico's opening goal against Valencia

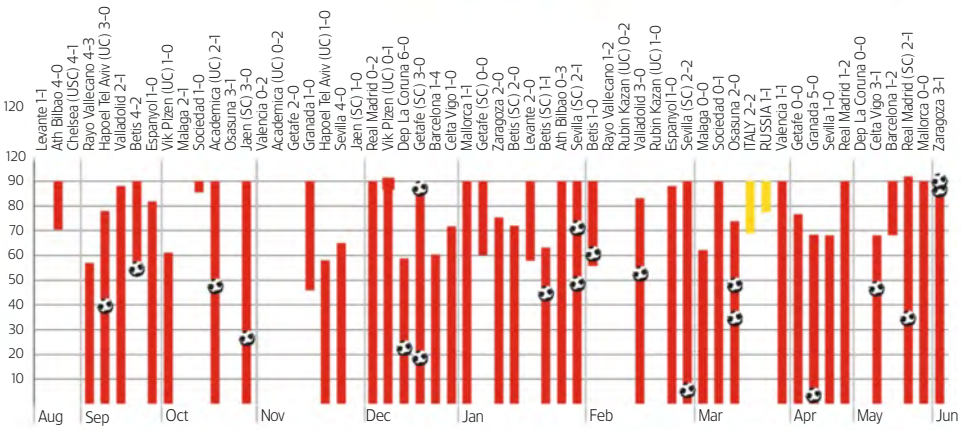
Like-minded...coach Simeone saw in Costa someone in his own image

> "He's such a good player, that's why we play the way that he needs"
>
> Atletico captain Gabi on Costa

Feb 19, 2012 – after being out injured for the first half of the season, he was loaned to Rayo Vallecano, where he scored four goals in his first three games, including two away to Levante.

May 17, 2013 – scores the first goal in Atletico's Spanish Cup Final win against Real Madrid at their rivals' Bernabeu Stadium.





2012-13

wrong way, but is a key part of his game.

As he recalled playing football as he grew up: "I fought with everyone. I had no respect for the opposition, I thought I had to kill them. Boys who grew up in academies are taught to control themselves and respect others, but no one ever told me. I was used to seeing players elbowing each other and thought it was normal."

Costa has been described in Spain as a "jailhouse" player. At times his legend has been exaggerated but it is certainly true that he winds people up and gets wound up back.

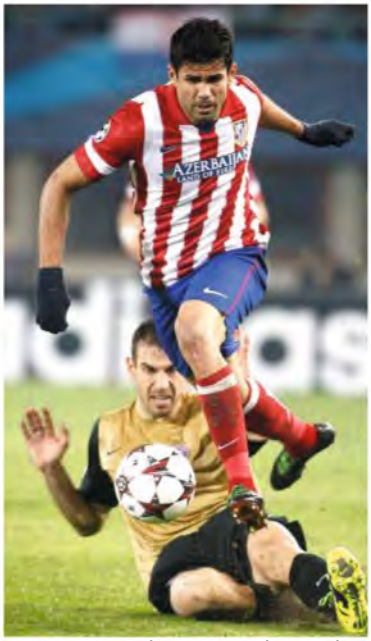
He bullies defenders, seeks contact, and has no problems diving and protesting. There's often something sneaky about his game, all underpinned by a win-at-all-costs attitude that some players have spoken up against. As Betis defender Damien Perquis put it: "He is a difficult player to put up with." Perquis' team-mate Amaya went further, saying: "Costa has no heart and no shame".

> "With space he is lethal"
>
> Former Valencia coach Miroslav Djukic

That often means he gets singled out for rough treatment by defenders hoping to provoke a reaction.

Twice now he has been spat on, while the sly digs and off-the-ball incidents are constant – and not always provoked by him. "No opponent ever says: 'Diego, I love you'," Costa says. "You get kicked, you hear all sorts of things. But I am more controlled."

Costa also insists that what happens on the pitch stays on the pitch – this is just about trying to win. "There are no scores to settle and no problems," he said after one particularly violent game.



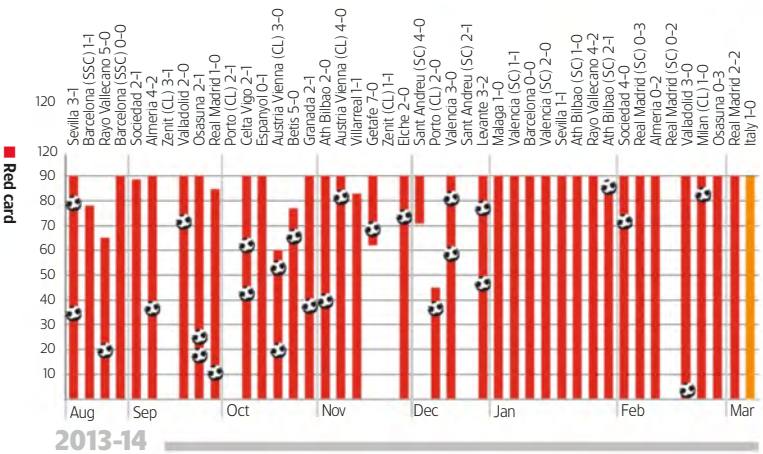
Euro march...powering through against Austria Vienna in the Champions League

During the first leg of the Spanish Cup tie against Real Madrid this season the conflict between he and Sergio Ramos was constant but at the end they shook hands. "Costa is the kind of player you want in your team," one dressing-room insider at Real Madrid admitted. Sergio Ramos would concur.

Choosing Spain over Brazil – which talked of his boldness, fearlessness, ambition and pride, his sense of worth – led to fears there may be problems within the Spain squad, but not by Costa.

"I kick Sergio Ramos and he kicks me," he said after that derby. "We get on better and better all the time." WS

Mar 5, 2014 – makes his Spain debut in a friendly in Madrid.



"What has Brazil ever done for me?"

Diego Costa might have been preparing to represent Brazil this summer if Luiz Felipe Scolari had treated him with more consideration in March last year. Given a few minutes from the bench in friendlies against Italy and Russia, he was then discarded without having a fair chance to show what he could do. But Costa's decision to opt for Spain is almost certainly based on more than a fit of pique.

The key is surely in a phrase that he used when he referred to the inner conflict he had to resolve between representing "the country where I was born or the country that has given me everything". Reading between the lines he was saying: "What has Brazil ever done for me?"

It is a fair point. Costa has not emerged from Brazil's underclass. He is working class from a stable background. "The only base I had was my family and the education my parents gave me," he recalls. That aside, he was on his own.

Costa grew up in Lagarto, in the state of Sergipe, in Brazil's relatively impoverished north east. He was born into football – named after Maradona as his brother was named after Jairzinho. But Lagarto had little to offer and he blames the excesses of his temperament on his lack of formal football education, claiming: "I grew up in an environment where it was normal to throw elbows around."

Reject...Costa was discarded by Scolari

Selling contraband

At 14 he moved to Sao Paulo to live with an uncle and hopefully improve his chances of making it as a footballer. Costa, though, was more interested in money. "Often I wouldn't go out because I couldn't invite a girl for something to eat," he says. Before the chance came to try his luck in Europe, he was taking the bus to Paraguay to pick up contraband to sell.

"There would be some kind of treason had Brazil invested in his career," wrote local journalist Vitor Birner of Costa's decision to play for Spain. "But, as with millions of other citizens, the country abandoned him. It did not even supply the basic, fundamental and indispensable services of good-quality education, health and security."

Not all were so understanding. Brazilian Football Confederation president Jose Maria Marin has a background in far-right politics and his knee-jerk response was the repugnant proposal that Costa's citizenship be cancelled.

Spain's Cesc Fabregas said recently: "I learned in the Confederations Cup that Brazil has a lot of anger towards Spain. It was a bit disappointing. We played in Recife, in Fortaleza, in Rio and all the time we were jeered – and this means Spain are playing well and are feared."

In the red shirt of Spain, Costa will be a convenient target for local fans this summer as the first to turn down Brazil in favour of a rival team.

Tim Vickery

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Facetoface

GIAMPAOLO MAZZA

"We tried to get good results even though we knew it was impossible"

As coach of San Marino for 15 years, before he stepped down last year, the 58-year-old failed to win a single competitive game

How did you get involved in coaching?
I started my professional career before I was 18 and played for San Marino when the federation was first recognised [in 1988]. I also played in the Italian third division. When I finished playing, I started training youth teams. I was the assistant coach to [national coach and former Juventus coach and midfielder] Massimo Bonini. In 1998 I became head coach.

San Marino is one of the smallest countries in the world and a team that finds it difficult to win. How did you approach a qualification campaign?
We've never won a match. We've only drawn two matches: against Turkey and Latvia. When we play matches we already know it is very difficult for us to win, to have a positive result. The spirit remains positive, and it remains positive because we have this satisfaction of playing famous teams from around the world; usually the kind of teams we only see on TV. We didn't feel defeated when we played. We tried to get good results even though we knew it was impossible.

At the beginning of any qualification campaign there must be some kind of hope. But does losing heavily eight or 10 times affect the players?
My job is to make sure about the physical state of my players, but the most important task is their psychological state. Because our players know we will have negative results it is important to reconstruct the morale.

How did you judge your qualification campaign for this year's World Cup?
We were in a very difficult group [with England, Poland, Ukraine and Montenegro]. All the teams were at the same level, so all the matches we had were difficult, apart from Moldova. It was very difficult for us. We were playing teams who were very focused and motivated. Even in the last match against Ukraine [which San Marino lost 8-0], they still had a chance to qualify if Poland beat England in Wembley.

What are the players like after games? Is there relief it's over?
We are used to these kind of results. We lost to Ukraine 8-0 and after this kind of defeat the players are always in a bad state of mind. They are upset at the score and the spirit is low. My most important job was to help the players regain their state of spirit and regain their trust.

What effects do losing regularly have, psychologically, on the players in their lives outside football?
All our players are amateurs so they have other jobs outside football. The day after the game they have to go back to their jobs. And, most probably, all the defeats are reflected in the day after the game. But I think even for the professional players the situation is the same. Certainly the players think less because the day after they have to go back to their jobs, while for the pros the situation is more difficult – they have to confront the media. We don't have this kind of media pressure!

How has it affected you?
I believe that for us the satisfaction is greater than for other teams. It is a big deal to play in certain games. It was very important for us to go to Wembley. Many professional players don't get to play at Wembley – we've been there twice.

What was the highlight during your time in charge?
During the time I was training we had one win. My greatest joy was that we won against Liechtenstein in a friendly match [1-0 in 2004]. There was a big party and we were very happy about it. But there was also the sadness of not having won an official match. It is not easy to win because we never play against teams which are at the same level as us.

What was your lowest moment?
I think the match for our team was against Germany in 2006 when San Marino lost 13-0. On that occasion many criticisms were addressed towards San Marino. They questioned our presence.

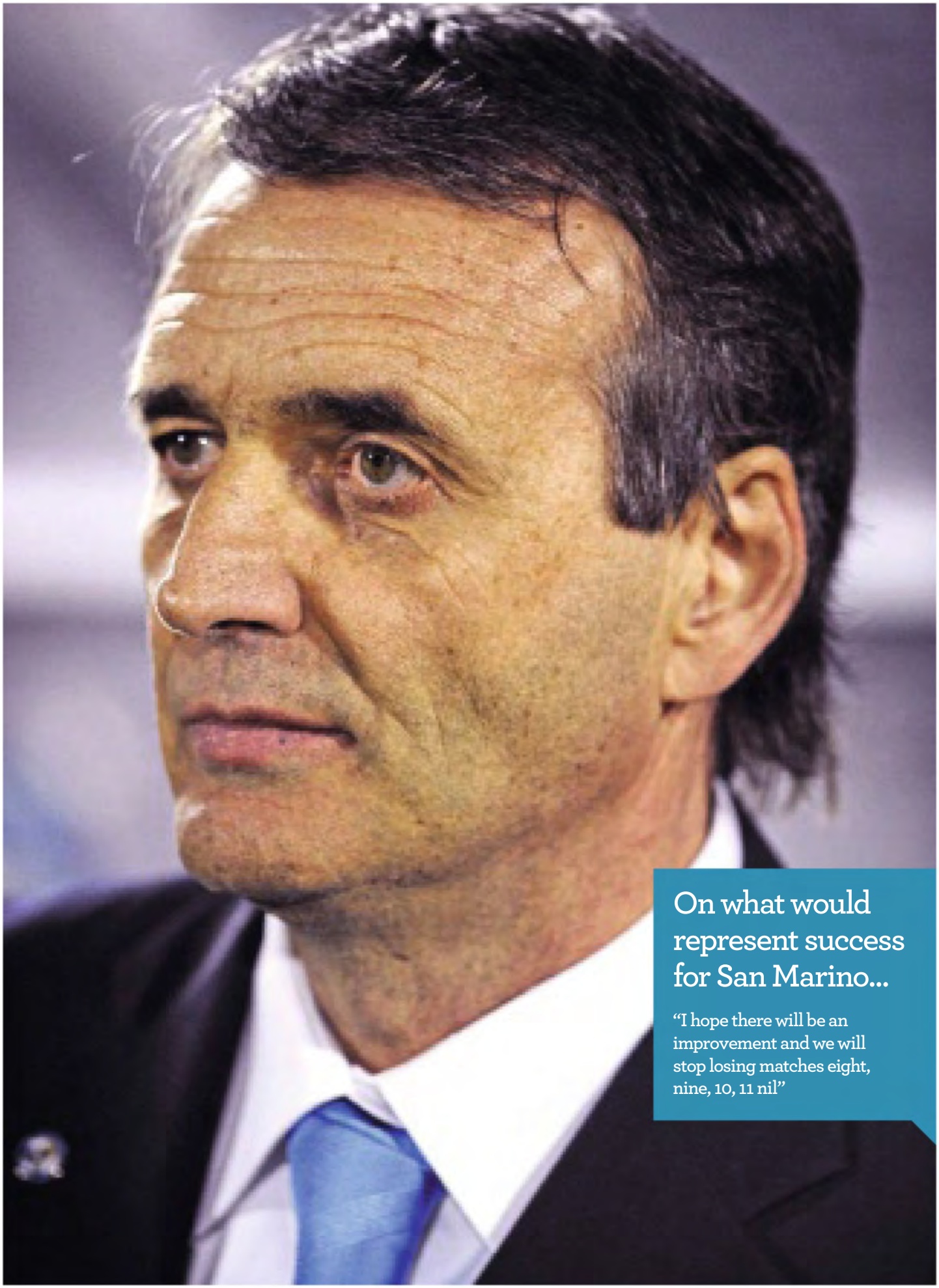
What do you say to critics who say that smaller nations shouldn't play with the bigger teams?
The same question was addressed to me at Wembley [after they had lost 5-0 in 2012] and I replied: "At the Olympics in London, Usain Bolt had to pass through several qualifications to get to the Final. Following the same reasoning, San Marino should participate by these rules. In sport, the powerful competitors should meet the weaker ones as well.

Why did you resign as national coach?
It had nothing to do with defeat, but I think after 16 years it is time to leave and let someone else lead the way with a different methodology and approach. I will remain in the field of football in San Marino. For four years now I am the coach of our youth team. The under-21 team won against Wales [San Marino's first-ever competitive victory at any level].

What advice would you give your successor, Pierangelo Manzaroli?
I believe we should think of our own limits. We shouldn't have big dreams or hopes because it would be difficult to change the results. I would be very happy if my successor manages to win a match, but I know that this will be impossible – at least from the experience I've had.

Interview by James Montague

Until his resignation last year, Mazza was the longest-serving international coach in European football. The only competitive game in charge of San Marino in which he managed to avoid defeat was a 1-1 World Cup qualifying draw with Latvia in April 2001.



On what would represent success for San Marino...

"I hope there will be an improvement and we will stop losing matches eight, nine, 10, 11 nil"

Facetoface

DIRK KUYT

"Who knows, maybe we can achieve something incredible in Brazil"

The sixth most-capped player in Holland's history, the 33-year-old has high hopes for this summer

This summer will be your fifth major tournament with Holland. What has coach Louis Van Gaal done to rejuvenate the team after your group exit at Euro 2012?
The Euros were a big disappointment. We were all deeply frustrated to go out the way we did. It just didn't go to plan. After we lost to Denmark we were always up against it in a very tough group. It's something that we can learn from. I'd love to put that behind me by doing well with Holland in Brazil. Van Gaal has freshened things up and introduced the right mix of youth and experience. He gives you a lot of confidence as a player and a person. The results in our qualification group were very good and we are confident we can give anyone a game.

What has changed in Holland's style and philosophy?
Holland has a tradition for playing with a specific style and philosophy that involves a 4-3-3 formation. Van Gaal has utilised this system but he has also introduced his own ideas and techniques that have enhanced how we deploy it. We are enjoying our football and he has had a massive impact. He is one of the world's best and a legendary coach in Dutch history. To put it simply, he is a winner.

In March last year, Van Gaal said that he thought Holland had little chance of winning the World Cup. Do you agree with him?
It was an honest answer. If you look at Brazil, Germany, Spain and Argentina they have so much quality in their team that they are going to be most people's favourites. However, the history of the World Cup shows that countries with one or two great individuals don't always lift the trophy. It's more about the best team unit and that's what we will focus on. It will be very interesting to see how we evolve in the summer if we get five to six weeks working with Van Gaal ahead of the tournament.

What are your thoughts on the World Cup draw and that opening game with Spain – which is, of course, a rematch of the 2010 Final?
It made me smile because it is just one of those strange twists of fate. People will mention the word "revenge" but it isn't about that for us. Much has changed in our set-up over the past four years and we will not be focusing on the past. They are big rivals in terms of playing in a big tournament so it would be really good to beat them. It's a massive game. Perhaps it's good to start against one of the best countries as we will have to be up for it from the very start. The focus of the media will understandably be on Spain versus Holland, but we cannot afford to underestimate Chile or Australia. It will be a hard pool. Australia are always very physical and difficult to play against. Chile have also impressed me and look a dangerous side with some match-winning individuals. It's a World Cup so we know we are going to have to play at a high level or we will be on an early plane home.

You are on the verge of joining Holland's "100 club". What will it mean to make a century of appearances for your country?
When I started out with Utrecht at the age of 18 I never envisaged playing for my country, never mind reaching such a prestigious landmark. In Holland, only Edwin Van Der Sar, Frank De Boer, Rafael Van der Vaart, Gio Van Bronckhorst and Phillip Cocu who have achieved the feat. These are some of the biggest names in our history and if I join that list it will be an amazing moment.

You've experienced a lot of highs and lows with Holland. What stands out in particular for you?
The biggest disappointment was the World Cup Final in 2010, but it is also one of the greatest moments in my career. It is the pinnacle of our sport, but it just wasn't meant to be. Our country was beaten in two World Cup Finals in the 1970s and we were desperate to make it third time lucky. Who knows, maybe we can go one better sooner than people think and achieve something incredible in Brazil.

Van Gaal is set to leave his post after the World Cup and he has been linked with a move to England. Would he succeed there?
He would be perfect for the Premier League. He has so much quality as a coach. He has won trophies everywhere he has been and I think he would do the same in England. Whoever is lucky enough to acquire his services could be in for some exciting times. He almost guarantees silverware.

Guus Hiddink will take over from Van Gaal for the Euro 2016 qualifiers. Do you expect to be involved?
In the summer I will be 34. I would never say no to my country but, if you think logically, Brazil is likely to be my last tournament. I have enjoyed 10 years with the national team and it has given me huge joy. I will always be there if they need me, but I expect Holland to look to the future after the World Cup.

How many more years do you hope to play for at club level?
At the moment I feel very good. I am still very strong and I'm enjoying my football. I look at the likes of Ryan Giggs and I feel jealous. I also want to play to that age. What's most important to me is that I continue to give everything. I want to make sure that I have done everything possible to succeed. I don't want to look back on any part of my career and have regrets.

Interview by Paul Hassall

A runner-up at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, the former Utrecht, Feyenoord and Liverpool midfielder now plays his club football in Turkey with Fenerbahce.

On having a mid-season break...

"I've heard it suggested England's players are tired going into major tournaments and perhaps it's something the Premier League could try to avoid burn-out"

Pellegrini not to blame

Jonathan Wilson says the Manchester City boss so nearly got it right in the first leg of their Champions League game against Barcelona

Pivotal moment...Demichelis brings down Messi, leading to the Manchester City defender's red card and Barcelona taking the lead from the resulting penalty

There was something very strange about the reaction to Manchester City's defeat at home to Barcelona in the first leg of their Champions League round-of-16 clash. Manuel Pellegrini didn't help with his bizarre post-match comments about the Swedish referee Jonas Eriksson, but a lot of the complaints about his tactical approach were baffling.

There was the familiar demand for explanation, as if everything must be readily explicable and can be divided into right and wrong: a team lost and therefore the manager must have done something wrong.

But sometimes events just happen; a game can simply be turned by a freakish bounce, a single moment of brilliance or an individual error.

Anyone seeking a neat tactical explanation for every result is, quite simply, misunderstanding the fundamental nature of tactics.

> "He did not have any control of the game. He favoured Barcelona from the beginning to the end"
> Manchester City manager Manuel Pellegrini's comments on referee Jonas Eriksson earned him a two-match ban

In *The Numbers Game* by Chris Anderson and David Sally, the authors argue that between two teams of roughly equal standard the result will be half determined by luck. Let's take that as a starting point.

Say there is a game in which both teams have a 50 per cent chance of winning. If one manager – by targeting a slow full-back or cutting off the supply to a striker or making some other tactical tweak – can give his side a 55 per cent chance of winning, he has done his job. If he can make it 60 per cent, even better. But even if he makes it 70 per cent, and has therefore done a brilliant job, there is still a 30 per cent chance his team will lose. Football, like life, isn't black and white, but infinite shades of grey.

Too cautious

The criticism of Pellegrini seemed to have three strands: that he had used Aleksandar Kolarov as a midfielder, that he had selected Martin Demichelis at the heart of the back four, and that he had generally been too cautious.

There may, perhaps, be some substance to the final point. As Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho pointed out with typical bluntness, this is not the same Barcelona as the one that

dominated Europe under Pep Guardiola. It is an extremely good side, but not one of the greatest that has ever existed. They do not press with the intensity or play with the urgency they once did and that gives opposing teams a chance.

The following night Bayern Munich, who under Guardiola have now taken on many of the characteristics of his Barca, looked rattled for 20 minutes or so as Arsenal tore into them. Who knows what might have been if Mesut Ozil had converted his penalty. And who knows what might have been had City begun with similar vigour against Barcelona.

It's possible that City might have rattled their Spanish visitors as it is widely recognised that Barcelona are extremely vulnerable if you can force them on the defensive.

But that is only a possibility and, given how City had been picked off by Bayern at home in the group stage, it is understandable that Pellegrini should favour something more conservative.

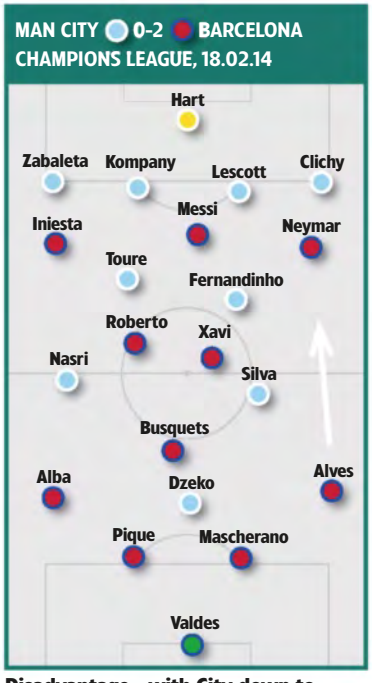
The point is that, until Demichelis' sending off, it was working. Even after playing over a third of the game with 10 men, City had only one chance fewer than Barca. True, Barcelona had roughly two-thirds of the possession but, until the Demichelis error, they rarely looked like doing anything with it.

Those possession figures have been used as a stick with which to beat Pellegrini, but there are more ways of controlling a game than by just having the ball more than the opposition. In the semi-final last season, Bayern also had around a third of possession yet beat Barcelona 4-0 in the first leg.

Part of the reason for Barca's impotence was the use of Kolarov, who effectively closed down Dani Alves as City played two left-backs to stifle Barca's use of two right-wingers. Just how big an impact he'd had was clear after the sending off. With Kolarov withdrawn soon afterwards so Joleon Lescott could be brought on, Alves was released, made some decisive surges and ultimately scored the second goal.

Tactical ploy...the use of Kolarov (left) to block Alves' runs worked well until City were forced into a switch

Thoughtful... City manager Pellegrini favoured a conservative approach



Disadvantage...with City down to 10 men, Alves could surge forward

Defensive work

The Demichelis issue is much more complicated. His distribution was woeful and that invited pressure, while his foul on Lionel Messi was either brainless, desperate or both. But his defensive work until the red card had been excellent.

Demichelis is slow – force him to turn and he looks terrible – but he is very good when the game is played in front of him. All through that first 50 minutes he had been able to go to the ball, snapping around Messi, safe in the knowledge that Vincent Kompany was behind him as cover.

The problem came when Jesus Navas was unexpectedly dispossessed. Kompany was probably dawdling slightly behind where he should have been, meaning that as Barcelona countered, Messi could drift into an onside position behind Demichelis.

Andres Iniesta played a quick and perfectly weighted pass, Demichelis was forced to turn and Messi was away. Demichelis ultimately took the blame, but Kompany and Navas were not without fault – and had it not been for Iniesta's speed of thought, the situation would not have materialised anyway.

Moments like that happen. There was an element of luck in the way the ball broke from the challenge on Navas, and the play unfolded as it did in part because of Barcelona's tactical approach in always looking for rapid transitions. Other than questioning Kompany's initial positioning – and even that is a little harsh, given the ball was in the opponents' half at the time – the move that resulted in a penalty and Demichelis' red card did not stem from a tactical error.

Pellegrini's plan, in fact, was working when the dismissal changed the game.

Suppose the referee, as he might have done, had given a free-kick to Navas, the break had not happened and Demichelis therefore had not committed his game-defining foul. What was the most likely outcome? The game was tight, but City had become more dangerous as the first half had gone on. It is entirely possible they might have kept a clean sheet and nicked a winner. Would Pellegrini then have been a genius?

Tactical rights and wrongs are not simple; it can't simply be assumed that victory equals tactical success and defeat tactical failure. WS

Philips Stadion

EINDHOVEN

Peterjon Cresswell visits the home of former European champions PSV

Even though they haven't won the Eredivisie since 2008, PSV still attract average crowds of 33,000 fans for home games – some 28,000 of which are season-ticket holders.

Having celebrated their centenary last year, Holland's second-most titled team – they won the European Cup in 1988 and have been Dutch champions 21 times – has spent its entire history at the ground built by and named after the company behind the club itself: Philips.

When the electrical-goods company opened a simple playing field for employees in 1910, it was part of a village of factories and housing known as "Philipsdorp". A works team, Philips Elftal, played friendlies here until, in 1913, Philips Sport Verenigeng were formed at a company dinner to celebrate 100 years of Dutch independence from Napoleon.

PSV, as they came to be known, were crowned champions in 1929, when the Dutch title was settled by regional play-offs, and they became Holland's first representatives in the European Cup in 1965.

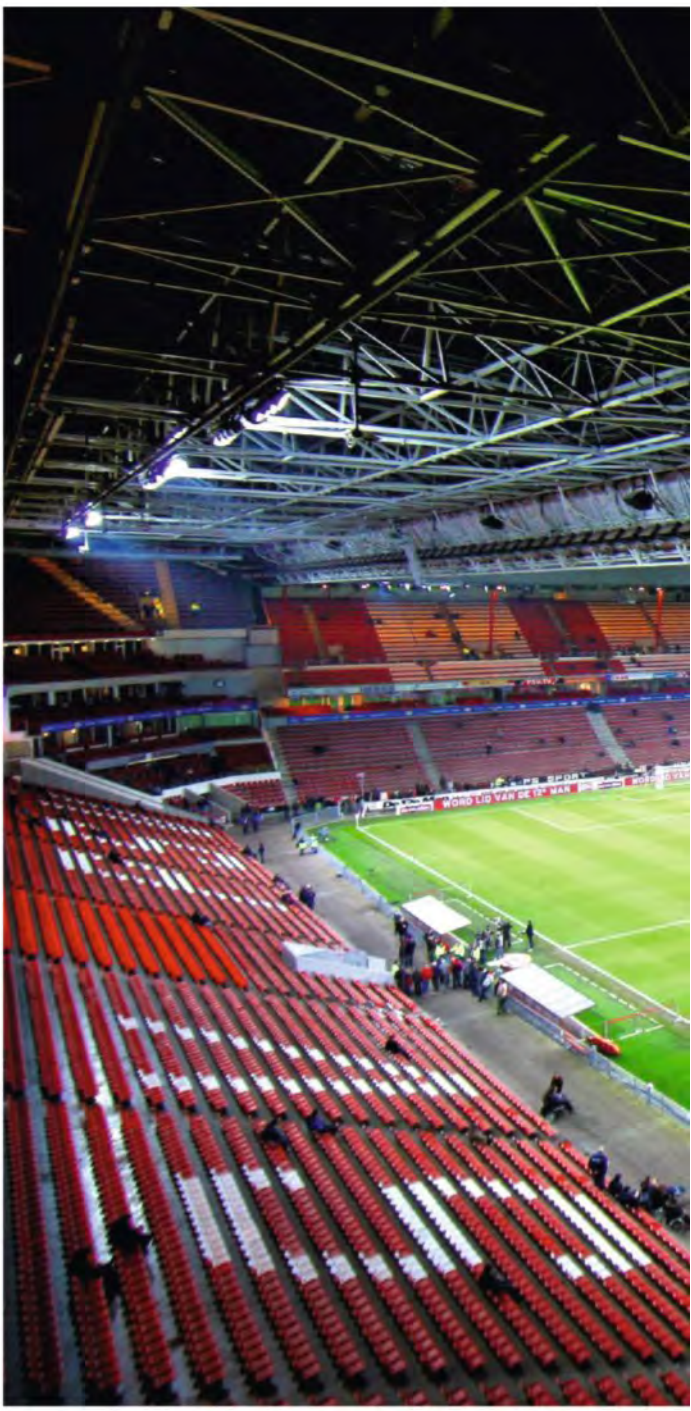
By the 1970s – with the stadium's running track having been removed, modern floodlights and four stands installed – the Philips Stadion was attracting crowds of around 25,000 for the visits of Johan Cruyff's Ajax, Wim Van Hanegem's Feyenoord and European games against Real Madrid and Benfica.

With the arrival of ex-PSV player Kees Rijvers as coach, and the Van der Kerkhof twins Willy and Rene, PSV won the league title three times in the mid 1970s and lifted the UEFA Cup in 1978, beating Bastia on penalties in the Final.

Ten years later, under Guus Hiddink, a side starring Ronald Koeman and Wim Kieft stormed the Dutch league and won Europe's premier trophy against Benfica on penalties. Three months later, Philips unveiled a new roof, upper tier and state-of-the-art floodlights system with a friendly against a Milan side containing PSV old boy Ruud Gullit.

With gleaming club offices, corporate boxes and dining outlets, the stadium, gradually expanded through the early 1990s and became all-seated in preparation to host Euro 2000. Capacity reached 33,000 and today stands at 35,000. In 2006 the ground hosted the UEFA Cup Final, in which Sevilla beat Middlesbrough 4-0.

● *Eindhoven is one of hundreds of soccer cities featured in Libero, the digital travel guide for football fans, available at liberoguide.com*



Fully enclosed...the stadium has a capacity of 35,000

TICKETS

There are a limited number of tickets set aside for matches, but you will need to buy a "package" using an application form on the club website at www.psv.nl/Ticketing/Application-form.htm

Tickets – which can be picked up at the desk by gate 17 during the week (Mon-Thur 10am-6pm, Fri 10am-9pm, Sat 10am-5pm) or gate 16 on match days – are likely to be in the corners of the ground, with prime seats over the halfway line in the North or South stands sold as part of "gold packages". Home fans gather in the East Stand, with away supporters in corner sectors MM of the West.

The basic "silver package" for a standard league game is €56 (which includes €31 to be spent at the club shop and food outlets) and €77.50 for games against Ajax, Feyenoord and Twente. "Gold packages" are twice the price. There is also a reservation fee of €15.

Eye level...PSV's immaculate pitch

Heroes...the statues of Dijkstra (left) and Van der Kuijlen outside the ground

Modern outlook...the stadium prepares for the visit of rivals Ajax

All change...the bus stop by the ground

HOW TO GET THERE

The stadium couldn't be better located, with its own stop on the 401 bus line that runs from the airport to the railway station. Alternatively, you can either walk 10 minutes turning right from the station, past Media Markt up Mathildelaan, or take a six-minute journey on buses 13, 14, 16, 18, 401 or 402. Tickets, including the airport, are €3.50 single.

EATING & DRINKING

There are a significant number of bars and restaurants around the stadium. If you're looking for an upscale restaurant, try Avant Garde while Coen & Willy (a reference to post-war stars Dillen and Van der Kuijlen, whose statues both stand outside the ground) is an affordable cafe, but the Sports Cafe & Lounge is for corporate guests. De Verlenging ("extra time") is a large bar/restaurant decked out in images from PSV's history. Just outside the ground, over the main road, De Aftrap is a supporters' bar decorated with graffiti.

CLUB SHOP

By entrance 17, you will find PSV Fanworld (Mon-Thur 10am-6pm, Fri 10am-9pm, Sat 10am-5pm, 2hrs before kick-off, 1hr after the game) the club's expansive outlet for merchandise. There's also a smaller store at the Supporterswinkel (Mon 1-6pm, Tue 10am-6pm, Sat 11am-5pm, match days) at gate 11.

Entitled...the road outside the stadium was renamed PSVlaan for the club's centenary

MUSEUM & TOUR

Opened by Willy Van der Kuijlen for the club's centenary in August 2013, the PSV Museum (Mon-Thur 10am-5pm, Fri 10am-8pm, Sat 9am-4pm, match days, €7.50/under 13s €5) covers the history of the club in entertaining detail. It can be visited as part of an English-language tour (€17.50/under 13s €15, cash only, non-match days) for groups of 10 or over, booked through www.psv.nl/Philips-Stadium/Guided-tours.htm

Local rivals...PSV and FC Eindhoven's homes

FC EINDHOVEN

The city's other club, formerly known as EVV Eindhoven, were formed shortly before PSV, in 1909, and played their first "City of Light" derby against PSV in 1915. The "*Blauw-witten*" surpassed their city rivals either side of the war, winning the Dutch Cup in 1937 and League in 1954. Relegated shortly afterwards, they have spent most of the last few decades in the lower flight.

Operating in co-operation with PSV for the last 10 years and exchanging young players, FC Eindhoven currently stand a reasonable chance of promotion to the top flight. They play at the Jan Louwers Stadion, which is part of a sports education complex set in woodland at the far southern edge of Eindhoven. Match tickets (€13/under 17s €5) can be bought on the day.

Connected via the main Alsterweg from the city centre, the stadium can be accessed via buses 7, 171 or 172, each half-hourly, from Eindhoven station, alighting at Theo Koomenlaan. There's a supporters' bar and restaurant at the ground, a cafe at the indoor sports hall next door, and Japanese restaurant, Oriental Green House, on the main road.

Hat tricks...pictures of former players hang at De Verlenging

All a PSV supporter needs...one of the counters at the fans' shop

Colourful...graffiti adorns De Aftrap bar

6 of the best

Lesser lights at the World Cup

Nick Bidwell on those who will play second fiddle to the big names in Brazil

1 Lazaros CHRISTODOULOPOULOS

GREECE

Despite some Greece fans finding it incomprehensible that the relatively uncomplicated 27-year-old Bologna winger enjoys more international playing time than such skilled players as Giannis Fetfatzidis and Sotiris Ninis, it does not alter the fact that Christodoulopoulos fits snugly into the conservative philosophy of national coach Fernando Santos.

With his ability to play on either flank and tactical discipline, Christodoulopoulos brings the best out of team-mates. And whether starting or used as back-up for Georgios Samaras or Dimitris Salpingidis, he is ready to go at a moment's notice. A full international for the past six years, he has not, however, spent his entire career on message.

While on international duty for the junior side, he earned notoriety for fighting in the dressing room with Panagiotis Kone – who now plays alongside him at Bologna – and as a youngster at PAOK he fell out with the club's management after they refused to let him leave for Liverpool. "I'd rather work on a building site than play again for PAOK," he famously declared, thus giving rise to his nickname: "The Builder".

2 Ryoichi MAEDA

JAPAN

Too often overlooked as Shinji Kagawa, Keisuke Honda and Shinji Okazaki scoop most of the plaudits, the 32-year-old Jubilo Iwata striker tends to be the unappreciated man of Japan's national set-up.

A quasi-permanent member of the side that sailed through the World Cup 2014 qualifiers – he also scored four goals – and involved in all of last year's Confederations Cup games, Maeda clearly has the trust of coach Alberto Zaccheroni. If only the same could be said of the Japanese media, who despite admiring his endeavour, hold-up play, strength in the air and fine goalscoring record in the J League – he was the championship's leading marksman in 2009 and 2010 – are not quite sure if he can cut it at the highest level.

By his own high standards, Maeda was a little off colour in the 2013 domestic campaign. He was unable to prevent Jubilo's relegation to the second tier and may have to move on to stay in contention for the national side.

Asia's young player of the Year in 2000, he has yet to appear in the final stages of a World Cup and time, as he is well aware, is running out fast.

3 Benjamin MOUKANDJO

CAMEROON

The scorer of a brilliant solo goal as Cameroon clinched their World Cup place with a 4-1 home victory over Tunisia in the play-offs, the 25-year-old wide man or auxiliary striker is not one to lay down and play dead when adversity calls. Rejected by his first professional club Rennes, down and out in the French third tier with L'Entente SSG and relegated from Ligue 1 with both Monaco and current employers Nancy, Moukandjo has on several occasions looked out for the count, only to haul himself off the canvas each time and carry on slugging.

It makes absolutely no difference to Cameroon coach Volker Finke that he is only playing in the French second division at the moment. Not only has he proved himself a wonderful foil to iconic national striker Samuel Eto'o, but with every international game he seems to be growing in confidence and attacking-third influence.

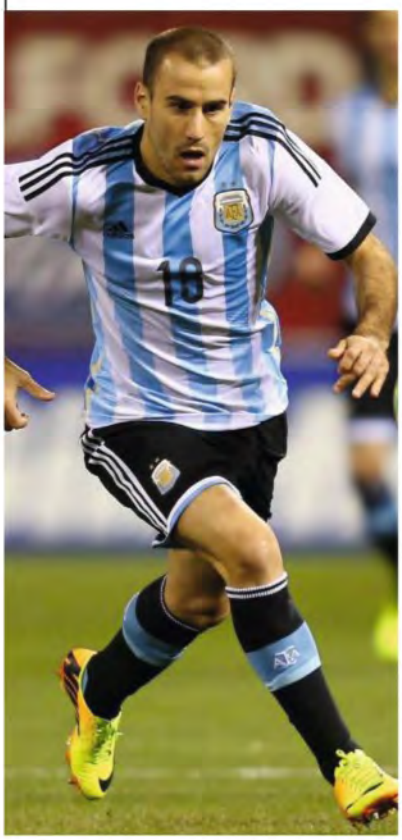
How proud they must be at Cameroon's premier sports college, the Kadji Sports Academy in Douala, which not only spawned Eto'o and Moukandjo but also current international central defenders Aurelien Chedjou and Nicolas N'koulou.

4 Rodrigo PALACIO

ARGENTINA

It's not hard to understand why the forward known as "*La Joya*" (the jewel) has appeared in only 18 matches during his nine years on the international beat. With the world-beating likes of Messi, Tevez, Aguero and Higuain all carrying considerably more weight in the selection stakes, he has had to make do with bits and pieces here and there.

But while many of today's ego-driven modern pros would have given up the ghost long ago, the 32-year-old from Internazionale is a different breed. Representative honours still send shivers down his spine and, buoyed by a place in the starting line-up for August's friendly win in Italy and a goal in a World Cup qualifying victory over Peru a couple of months later, he has good reason to be confident of being on the plane to Brazil.



A player of his many and varied attributes could be of immense help to Argentina coach Alex Sabella. Speedy, direct, exceptional on the counter-attack and with a right-foot of force and precision, he breathes fire both as striker or winger and is intelligent tactically.

Only on the pitch for 27 minutes at the 2006 World Cup, he has his fingers crossed for a meatier tour of duty this summer.

5 Lacina TRAORE

IVORY COAST

Sabri Lamouchi, the coach of "*Les Elephants*", need not worry about a back-up plan should star striker Didier Drogba get injured or require some rest this summer. Arguably ahead of Wilfried Bony, Seydou Doumbia and Giovanni Sio in the back-up pecking order, the gangling Traore is a guarantee of inconvenience for any central defender.

The 22-year-old's link-up play, ball-control and work in the channels are all of the highest order and he has bags of flair. Like so many Ivorian internationals, he is a graduate of the famous ASEC Mimosas academy in Abidjan, later cutting his European teeth at Romanian club CFR Cluj before heading to Russia and playing for Kuban Krasnodar and Anzhi, where he dovetailed nicely with Samuel Eto'o. He left for Monaco in January and they have since loaned him out to Everton.

6 Christian STUANI

URUGUAY

As good as Edinson Cavani and Luis Suarez are, there is much more to Uruguay than their pair of world-class goal getters. While the superstar strikers are deified, the rest of the side are for the most part sidelined. And this certainly holds true for the 27-year-old Espanyol attacker who, after several seasons as a Euro journeyman – playing for Reggina in Italy and Spanish outfits, Albacete, Levante and Racing Santander – has recently established himself as a key member of the national team.

A central striker for the bulk of his career, he has mainly been used on the right-flank since joining Espanyol in 2012 – and what a great job he has done in redefining himself, adding nimble ball skills, crossing ability and industry to his old centre-forward physicality and aerial power.

The joint-top scorer in the 2007-08 Uruguayan apertura with 19 goals for Danubio, he is one of many talents to have emerged from the youth ranks of the Montevideo club, including Cavani, Ruben Sosa and Alvaro Recoba.

Keir Radnedge

THE INSIDER

The expert view on events off the pitch

Can Pinto rescue Platini's image?

UEFA president hires PR man but faces criticism over Euro 2016

In the president's ear...UEFA general secretary Gianni Infantino (left) and new PR chief Pinto consult with Platini at a press conference on the eve of the Euro 2016 qualifying draw

Michel Platini has a new voice as he enters the defining year of his presidency of UEFA. That voice is Pedro Pinto, who until last autumn had spent 12 years as the London-based face of football for the international news channel CNN.

Pinto, who is a long-standing *World Soccer* contributor, has been hired by UEFA as head of media with the specific charge of polishing Platini's image – which has been tarnished by the natural progression of time and events since he bounced out Lennart Johansson from the governing body of European football's hot seat.

Back then Platini was a bright new face of administration, gaining full credit for opening up the Champions League to more clubs and devising a system to attack the game's notorious financial profligacy.

But the decision to expand the European Championship finals to 24 teams reeked too much of prioritising finance over football. The jury also remains out on the "week of football" qualifying pattern – reasonable as Platini's wish is to colour up the fading status of national-team football.

One particular PR challenge for Pinto is knowing that the UK sports news media – by far the sharpest and most influential in Europe – has fallen out of love with Platini.

> One particular challenge for Pinto is knowing the UK sports media has fallen out of love with Platini

This is based largely on a misconception that he is no friend of English football. Yet that is false. Platini is a fervent admirer of the great traditions of the English game. This is why he revived the "Wembley walk" presentation and engineered a Saturday date switch for the Champions League Final.

Wembley Walk...Bayern Munich make their way back on to the pitch after collecting the Champions League trophy last season

Instead, Platini's frown is firmly directed at the overt commercialisation represented by the Premier League.

Pinto's appointment was viewed in some quarters as PR preparation by Platini for a tilt at the FIFA presidency next year. But with Sepp Blatter willing for a fifth term, the prospects for any rival candidate look hopeless – even declared rival Jerome Champagne, a former FIFA aide, has admitted as much.

Platini insists he will make a decision on whether to run only after the World Cup. Frankly, it looks as if he is dithering – in which case he should stick with UEFA and make that clear sooner rather than later.

After all, for Platini to harvest the credit for financial fair play and then oversee Euro 2016 in his home country would offer Pinto plenty of good news stories to promote. WS

● Read Keir Radnedge's exclusive online columns at worldsoccer.com

EURO 2016 DRAW

Qualifiers for the finals:
- Hosts France
- The top two in each of the nine groups
- The best third-place team
- The winners of the play-offs between the other eight third-place finishers

Group A	Group B	Group C
Holland	Bosnia-H'vina	Spain
Czech Republic	Belgium	Ukraine
Turkey	Israel	Slovakia
Latvia	Wales	Belarus
Iceland	Cyprus	Macedonia
Kazakhstan	Andorra	Luxembourg

Group D	Group E	Group F
Germany	England	Greece
Rep of Ireland	Switzerland	Hungary
Poland	Slovenia	Romania
Scotland	Estonia	Finland
Georgia	San Marino	N Ireland
Gibraltar	Lithuania	Faroe Islands

Group G	Group H	Group I
Russia	Italy	Portugal
Sweden	Croatia	Denmark
Austria	Norway	Serbia
Montenegro	Bulgaria	Armenia
Moldova	Azerbaijan	Albania
Liechtenstein	Malta	

Independence would open up a real Scottish can of worms

Voters in Scotland go to the polls on September 18 to decide whether the land of the Tartan Army should secede from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and declare independence.

Somewhere behind all the heavy talk about currency union (or division) and North Sea oil revenues comes the issue of Scotland at play. If Scots vote "Yes" that debate about the independent football status of England, Northern Ireland and Wales will be revived.

Independence would bring certain conundrums for FIFA and UEFA.

Currently the Scottish Football Association is a member of both world and European federations. But would Scotland, if it declared independence, "own" the protection of the original home nations deal brokered by Stanley Rous with FIFA in 1946?

When the Soviet Union collapsed everyone agreed that Russia should take over its memberships of FIFA and UEFA without re-applying. But the various states which fell away from the former Yugoslavia – Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia, Montenegro – all had to go through the necessary political hoops.

Some powerful sporting states such as Spain, Russia and Serbia possess an entrenched opposition to anything which encourages secession.

As Kosovo knows only too well, an independent state needs membership of the United Nations to apply to join UEFA...and that can take time.

Question of support...the Tartan Army may pay a price, too

Talentscout

Lucas ROMERO

COUNTRY	Argentina
CLUB	Velez Sarsfield
POSITION	Midfielder
AGE	19 (18.04.94)
HONOURS	2012 Argentinian Initial, 2013 Argentinian Super Final

Lucas Romero was born the year that Velez Sarsfield first won the Libertadores Cup and, having come up through the youth ranks, he is now a key part of the team that, 20 years later, is chasing its second continental title.

He gave a man-of-the-match performance as Velez began this year's Libertadores campaign with a 1-0 win away to Universitario of Peru and would appear destined for even bigger stages.

None of this comes as a surprise to Hector Almandoz, the former Velez player who now coaches the reserve team. "He's the joker in our pack," said Almandoz back in 2012 of the player he groomed. "He's hungry for glory and he's ready to show what he can do in the first team. He's mentally very strong, and he's convinced that he can take the step up. His style of play is reminiscent of 'Cholo' Simeone."

While it is unlikely Romero will emulate all the feats of Simeone, who won over 100 caps for Argentina, the comparison seems appropriate as the youngster has much of the current Atletico Madrid coach's fire and skill.

The tough central midfielder grew up playing no-holds-barred games for money at 13 in his native Loma Hermosa, on the outskirts of Buenos Aires. With his low centre of gravity, he snaps into his tackles, while knitting the side together with short and long passes. His clean striking of the ball means that he is also a goal threat from the edge of the area.

> "I like to play nice football,, but when it's needed I can put my foot in. At this level if you don't have strength of personality, you don't play"
> Lucas Romero

Thrown into the Velez first team at the age of 18, he made his debut as a substitute against Estudiantes and a week later he started the game against River Plate, after which he was named man of the match.

"This is not a normal kid," said team-mate Federico Insua at the time, amazed at the ease with which the youngster had taken to first team action.

"My dream is to play in England," says Romero – and his rugged versatility would seem to make him perfect for the task.

Tim Vickery

Hard to stop...Romero (right) in action for Velez against San Lorenzo midfielder Julio Buffarini during December's league encounter

High flier...Vestenicky dreams of playing alongside his idol Totti at Roma

Tomas VESTENICKY

CLUB	Roma (Ita, on loan)
COUNTRY	Slovakia
POSITION	Forward
AGE	17 (06.04.96)
PARENT CLUB	Nitra

Hailing from the same Nitra region of western Slovakia as former Saint-Etienne and Celtic midfielder Lubomir Moravcik, Vestenicky plays in the same cheery vein. And there was plenty of opportunity to see his broad smile last year as he scored five times at the Under-17 World Cup in the United Arab Emirates.

One of the stars of the show in the UAE – courtesy of his thumping right-footed shooting, heading ability and infectious desire – his agent was assailed with offers of overseas employment. And after sifting through them all, the striker eventually plumped, in January, for an 18-month loan deal with Serie A club Roma, who initially intend to use him in their youth team.

"I mainly chose Roma because Francesco Totti is an idol of mine," explained Vestenicky. "The dream is to play alongside him in the near future."

With only a smattering of first-team appearances for his parent club Nitra – and many, many challenges ahead of him in the Italian capital – Vestenicky obviously still has everything to prove. But he definitely has the potential to prosper in the European mainstream.

Italian supporters adore a front runner who possesses stealth and disguise, and in this facet of the game Vestenicky is already a master, always scavenging for scraps in the penalty area, cunning in his movement and brazenly hovering in the box with deadly intent.

Considered one of the most keen-eyed talent spotters in Europe, Roma technical director Walter Sabatini looks to have worked his magic again.

Nick Bidwell

Saul NIGUEZ

CLUB	Rayo Vallecano (on loan)
COUNTRY	Spain
POSITION	Midfielder
AGE	19 (21.11.94)
PARENT CLUB	Atletico Madrid

He may be on loan at neighbours Vallecano this season, but Atletico Madrid have no intention of letting Niguez leave home. With Arsenal and Liverpool circling during the January transfer window, "*Los Colchoneros*" recently extended his contract to 2019 and included a whopping €24million release clause for good measure.

Although Vallecano coach Paco Jemez has often used the talented teen in central defence, his true vocation is in central midfield, where he can contribute in all manner of ways: centrally or on the left, as an elegant passer or box-to-box dynamo, even as a shielder of the back four.

Capped at every level by Spain from under-16 to under-21, the youngster swapped Real Madrid's academy for that of Atletico at the age of 13 – and two years later he was playing in the Spanish third tier for the club's reserve side.

In March 2012 he became Atletico's youngest-ever debutant in continental competition, appearing in a Europa League tie against Besiktas aged 17 years and 108 days.

Yet his rapid progress does not shock anyone who is aware of his family ties. His father, Jose Antonio, was a striker with Elche, while older brothers Jony and Aaron are professionals with Alcorcon and Elche respectively.

His only real weakness is a lack of discipline and few players in the Spanish top flight have committed as many fouls as him this season. Sooner or later, those rough edges will have to be smoothed out.

Nick Bidwell

All-rounder...Niguez can perform most midfield roles that are required of him

Jonathan TAH

CLUB	Hamburg
COUNTRY	Germany
POSITION	Defender
AGE	18 (11.02.96)

Whether it's his impressive first six months as a first-team player, the transfer speculation which continues to envelop him or the details of his contract that someone leaked to the press, Hamburg's teenage centre-back is proving a rich seam for the German media to mine.

A ray of sunshine in Hamburg's overcast season of relegation struggle, the skipper of Germany's under-17 side has gone from fourth-choice stopper for his club to Bundesliga starlet in the blink of an eye – and is rumoured to be on Manchester City's radar.

> Although capped by Germany at under-16 and under-17 level, Tah could represent the Ivory Coast

The son of a German mother and Ivorian father, Tah is strong in the air, yet remains a down-to-earth character who is happy to devote himself to his football and high-school studies.

Until recently, he was the golden boy who could do no wrong. But how that has changed since the media published the hard numbers of the two-year contract extension he signed last November to take him through until 2018: the €25million release clause he is subject to this year (reduced to €15m in 2015) and his €50,000-a-month pay packet rising to €120,000 in 2017.

Tah's father Aquilas – who divorced his mother 14 years ago and makes no secret of his animosity towards his son's agent, Akeem Adewunmi – believes the contract is invalid, arguing FIFA rules forbid players under 18 from signing deals for more than three years. Hamburg and Adewunmi, though, swear it is watertight.

"The boy, along with his parents, have their signatures on the contract papers and so it is valid, there is nothing to challenge," Adewunmi told the *Hamburger Morgenpost*. "Jonathan wants to see out his contract."

Unfortunately, it's a messy and unworthy saga for the *wunderkind* rookie to be embroiled in.

Nick Bidwell

Contract controversy...details of Tah's deal with Hamburg have been leaked

International in the making...Rotariu has the backing of his hero, Niculescu

Dorin ROTARIU

CLUB	Dinamo Bucharest
COUNTRY	Romania
POSITION	Forward
AGE	18 (29.07.95)
PREVIOUS CLUB	Poli Timisoara

Electrifying and inventive, whether playing on either flank or as a secondary striker, the teenager has been thrilling the Romanian championship gallery all season with his spectacular goals and clever assists.

It has been quite a season for a youngster who only 18 months ago was playing youth-team football, then six months later finding his way with Dinamo's reserve side.

With his poise on the ball, quick feet and shooting accuracy, he has the ability to make the difficult look mundane and, as such, thoroughly deserves to be celebrated.

"His exceptional qualities and great potential are there for all to see," says Claudiu Niculescu, the ex-Dinamo marksman who Rotariu used to idolise. "In two or three years, he will be a fixture in the Romania side, of that there can be no doubt."

The nephew of former international midfielder Iosif Rotariu – who was a runner-up in the 1989 European Cup with Steaua Bucharest and took part in Italia 90 – is reported to be interesting Manchester United. And as a former student of the William Shakespeare high school in Timisoara he would have no problem with the language at Old Trafford.

But why rush? A big move to England, Spain or Italy will come soon enough and, under contract with Dinamo until 2019, he first needs to concentrate on what really matters: regular first-team football and some success with the "Red Dogs" of Bucharest.

Nick Bidwell

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EVENTS

World Service

The ultimate global news & results section

Clash...Bayer Leverkusen's Omer Toprak (left) battles with Zlatan Ibrahimovic of Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League

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Win...Al Jazira's Felipe Caicedo and coach Walter Zenga

World Service

CHILE

Copa 2015 cities

Next year's Copa America will be held in Chile from June 11 to July 4. Mexico and Japan have been invited to compete in the tournament which will be staged in eight cities: Antofagasta, Concepcion, La Serena, Rancagua, Santiago, Temuco, Vina del Mar and Valparaiso.

CYPRUS

Ref's car bombed

The friendly with Northern Ireland in Nicosia went ahead despite a referee's car being bombed on the island five days earlier. All first division matches in the country were cancelled the previous weekend after the explosion outside the home of Leontios Trattos in a suburb of the capital.

On target...Chipolina

GIBRALTAR

Team's first goal

Captain and centre-half Roy Chipolina scored his country's first-ever international goal, putting Gibraltar ahead against the Faroe Islands before they succumbed 4-1 at the Victoria Stadium.

"We just weren't good enough, we weren't fit enough," said coach Allen Bula, whose side were beaten 2-0 by Estonia four days later.

PANAMA

Renteria passes away

International striker Luis Renteria died at the age of 25 from respiratory failure after being hospitalised for more than six months with lupus. He scored five goals in 25 appearances.

Internationals

2015 ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS

Group A

Mar 5 - Amman
Jordan 2 (Bawab 24, 61)
Syria 1 (Khribin 80)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 3,745. **Ref:** Irmatov (Uzb)
Sent off: Bawab (Jordan) 61min

Mar 5 - Muscat
Oman 3 (Al Hosni 19, Said 51, Al Hasani 69)
Singapore 1 (Ishak 78)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 6,700. **Ref:** Ko (SKo)

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – GROUP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Oman (Q)	6	4	2	0	7	1	14
Jordan (Q)	6	3	3	0	10	3	12
Syria	6	1	1	4	7	7	4
Singapore	6	1	0	5	4	17	3

Group B

Mar 3 - Karaj
Iran 3 (Y Karimi 2, Sadeghian 61, Ansarifard 90+1)
Kuwait 2 (Nada 18, Al Rashidi 89)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 10,000. **Ref:** Mashentsev (Kyr)

Mar 5 - Bangkok
Thailand 2 (Teeratep pen 21, Adisak 75)
Lebanon 5 (Ghaddar 1, Maatouk 19, 46, Saad 45+1, Antar 62)
HT: 1-3. **Ref:** Yamamoto (Jap)

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – GROUP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iran (Q)	6	5	1	0	18	5	16
Kuwait (Q)	6	2	3	1	10	7	9
Lebanon	6	2	2	2	12	14	8
Thailand	6	0	0	6	7	21	0

Group C

Mar 5 - Sharjah, UAE
Iraq 3 (Mahmoud 23, 42, Adnan 58)
China 1 (Zhang Xizhe pen 72)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Nishimura (Jap)

Mar 5 - Dammam
Saudi Arabia 1 (Al Muwallad 87)
Indonesia 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 9,500. **Ref:** Al Jeneibi (UAE)

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – GROUP C – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Saudi A'bia (Q)	6	5	1	0	9	3	16
Iraq (Q)	6	3	0	3	7	6	9
China (Q)	6	2	2	2	5	6	8
Indonesia	6	0	1	5	2	8	1

Group D

Mar 5 - Doha
Qatar 0
Bahrain 0
Att: 12,878. **Ref:** Al Mirdasi (Sau)
Sent off: Muthana (Bahrain) 83min

Mar 5 - Al Ain City, UAE
Yemen 1 (Al Sarori 60)
Malaysia 2 (Yahyah 16, Saarani 77)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 311. **Ref:** Kovalenko (Uzb)
Sent off: Taj (Malaysia) 10min

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – GROUP D – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bahrain (Q)	6	4	2	0	7	1	14
Qatar (Q)	6	4	1	1	13	2	13
Malaysia	6	2	1	3	5	7	7
Yemen	6	0	0	6	3	18	0

Group E

Mar 5 - Tashkent
Uzbekistan 1 (Sergeev 85)
United Arab Emirates 1 (Al Hammadi 67)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 15,000. **Ref:** Kim Sang-woo (SKo)
Sent off: Tukhtakhujaev (Uzbekistan) 90min

Mar 5 - Hanoi
Vietnam 3 (Huynh Quoc Anh 24, Nguyen Anh Duc 68, Nguyen Trong Hoang 83)
Hong Kong 1 (Lo Kwan-yee 81)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 5,800. **Ref:** Bin Yaacob (Mly)

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – GROUP E – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
UAE (Q)	6	5	1	0	18	3	16
Uzbekistan (Q)	6	3	2	1	10	4	11
Hong Kong	6	1	1	4	2	13	4
Vietnam	6	1	0	5	5	15	3

Top 2 in each group and the 3rd-placed team with the best record (China) qualified for finals, to which Japan, North Korea, South Korea, hosts Australia and the 2014 AFC Challenge Cup winners qualify automatically. The finals draw will be held on March 26, 2014

FRIENDLIES

Friday, February 7

Feb 7 - Kingstown
St Vincent & The Grenadines 3 (McBurnette 10, Solomon pen 39, K Francis 82)
Dominica 2 (Parker 71, M Joseph 83)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Gaymes (StV)
St Vincent & The Grenadines: Williams - Richards, Richardson, K Francis, Solomon, E George (Badnock 85), McBurnette (Osment 67), Hamlet, McMaster (Durham 88), Ledger, Anderson (Lee 74).
Dominica: Toulon - Walsh, Dailey, Prince, Hazel, Vigilante (Jervier 34), Phillip, Christopher (McKenzie 53), Parker, M Joseph, Langlais (Wade 65).

Sunday, February 9

Feb 9 - Kingstown
St Vincent & The Grenadines 0
Dominica 0
Ref: Gaymes (StV)
St Vincent & The Grenadines: Lynch - Richards, Richardson, K Francis, McMaster, McBurnette (Osment 58), Hamlet, Ledger, Anderson (M Samuel 62), Solomon, E George.
Dominica: Toulon - Walker, Dailey, McKenzie, Prince, Hazel, Thomas, Christopher (Loval 63), Jervier, Parker, V Joseph.

Wednesday, February 19

Feb 19 - Sidon
Lebanon 3 (Ismail 7, Awada 16, Tahan 86)
Pakistan 1 (Kaleemullah 17)
HT: 2-1

Friday, February 21

Feb 21 - Dubai, UAE
Iraq 2 (Nadhim 9, Abdul Rahim 67)
North Korea 0
HT: 1-0

Saturday, March 1

Mar 1 - Gibraltar
Gibraltar 1 (R Chipolina 21)
Faroe Islands 4 (Edmundsson 26, Holst 31, 68, H Hansson 59)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Knight (Gib)
Gibraltar: Perez - Sergeant (Santos 46), J Chipolina, Higginbotham, R Chipolina (Artell 86), R Casciaro, Lopez (J-P Duarte 57), Payas, Styche (Hernandez 71), D Duarte (K Casciaro 46), Guilling (Priestley 46),
Faroe Islands: Gestsson (Thomsen 46) - Naes, Baldvinsson, Nattestad, V Davidsen (Haraldsen 85), Sorensen (Bartalsstovu 81), Benjaminsen, H Hansson (Lokin 76), P Justinussen (Vatnsdal 46), Holst, Edmundsson (K Olsen 81).

Mar 1 - Selayang
Malaysia 0
Philippines 0
Ref: Bin Yaacob (Mly)

Sunday, March 2

Mar 2 - Bridgetown
Barbados 0
Jamaica 2 (Mattocks 76, D Brown 82)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Johnson (Guy)
Barbados: Boxhill - Brown, Burgess (Highland 72), Morris, Miller, Sargeant, Jeffrey Williams, Harewood, Jamaal Chandler (Lloyd 83), Joseph (Jabarry Chandler 86), Harte (Adamson 73).
Jamaica: Blake - Powell (Gray 86), Lawrence, Finlayson (Dicoy Williams 88), U Edwards, Morris (R Campbell 46), Lloyd (Seaton 46), Beckett (J-R Edwards 69), Watson, Mattocks, D Brown.

Wednesday, March 5

Mar 5 - Durres
Albania 2 (M Basha 26, Meha 52)
Malta 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Jakimovski (Mac)
Albania: Berisha (Shehi 85) - Lila, Mavraj, Agolli, Cana, M Basha (Vila 82), Meha (Abrashi 64), Kace (Memushaj 78), Kapllani (Sadiku 78), Rama (Roshi 71), Hyka.
Malta: Hogg - A Muscat, Bezzina, Sciberras (Kristensen 57), A Agius, P Fenech, Failla, M Mifsud (Vella 89), Schembri (Cohen 66), Mintoff, Camilleri (Herrera 90+1).

Mar 5 - Blida
Algeria 2 (Soudani 45+2, Taider 56)
Slovenia 0
HT: 1-0
Algeria: Zemmamouche - Mandi, Cadamuro, Bougherra (Halliche 50), Ghoulam, Mostefa (Lacen 55), Bentaleb, Taider (Yebda 76), Djabou (Ferhat 60), Soudani (Kadir 85), Slimani (Djebbour 70).
Slovenia: S Handanovic - Brecko (Struna 46), Ilic, Cesar, Ilicic (Pecnik 59), Jokic (Milec 69), Krhin (Mertelj 52), Kurtic, Kampl, Kirm (Birsa 46), Bezjak (Matavz 46).

Mar 5 - Andorra la Vella
Andorra 0
Moldova 3 (Epureanu 13, 52, Luvannor 22)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Sant (Mlt)
Andorra: Pol - C Martinez, Sonejee (Ayala 46), E Garcia, Lima, M Vieira, Peppe (Pujol 46), Lorenzo (Moreno 69), Gomes (Riera 46), M Garcia (Maneiro 79), Rubio (Rodriguez 59).
Moldova: Cebanu - Armas, Posmac (Burghiu 80), Racu, Epureanu, Ionita, Gatcan, Picusciac (Sidorenco 68), Dedov, Luvannor (Ginsari 84), A Antoniuc (Patras 80).

Mar 5 - Klagenfurt
Austria 1 (Janko 14)
Uruguay 1 (A Pereira 65)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Aytekin (Ger)
Austria: Almer (Lindner 46) - Garics (Klein 17), Dragovic, Hinteregger, Suttner, Alaba, Leitgeb (Kavlak 71), Harnik (Ivanschitz 46), Junuzovic (Hinterseer 67), Arnautovic (Sabitzer 81), Janko.
Uruguay: Muslera - M Pereira (Lodeiro 63), Lugano (Gimenez 29), Godin, Fucile, Perez (Gargano 46), Arevalo (A Gonzalez 80), Stuani, C Rodriguez (A Pereira 63), Forlan (Ramirez 46), Suarez.

Mar 5 - Dubai, UAE
Azerbaijan 1 (Yunuszade 26)
Philippines 0
HT: 1-0

Mar 5 - Brussels
Belgium 2 (Fellaini 18, Nainggolan 51)
Ivory Coast 2 (Drogba 74, Gradel 90+2)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 46,500. **Ref:** Skomina (Sln)
Belgium: Courtois - Alderweireld (Vanden Borre 46), Van Buyten (Lombaerts 46), Kompany, Vertonghen (Pocognoli 82), Fellaini (Nainggolan 46), Witsel, Mirallas (E Hazard 62), De Bruyne, Benteke (Lukaku 73), Mertens.
Ivory Coast: Mande - Aurier, K Toure, Zokora, Boka (Djakpa 46), Y Toure (Bony 83), Kalou, Die, Sio (Drogba 46), Tiote, Gervinho (Gradel 64).

Mar 5 - Innsbruck, Austria
Bosnia-Herzegovina 0
Egypt 2 (Gedo 52, M Salah 64)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 14,000
Bosnia-Herzegovina: Begovic - Bicakcic, Spahic, Kolasinac (Vranjes 46), Mujdza (Hadzic 46), Salihovic, Lulic (Hajrovic 61), Muratovic (Susic 11; Vrsajevic 78), Medunjanin, Ibisevic (Visca 63), Dzeko.
Egypt: Ekramy (El Hadary 46) - Fathy, Said, Ghazal, Rabia (El Said 61), Elmohamady (Abdel Khalek 83), Qamar (Farouk 86), Ghaly, El Nenny, M Salah (Hamed 90), Gedo (Gamal 73).

Mar 5 - Gaborone
Botswana 3 (Mogorosi 35, 45, Nato 72)
South Sudan 0
HT: 2-0

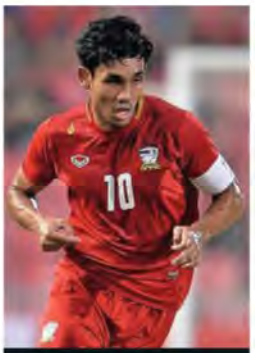
Mar 5 - Sofia
Bulgaria 2 (G Milanov 14, Gadzhev 66)
Belarus 1 (Krivets 86)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Vukadinovic (Ser)
Bulgaria: V Stoyanov - Y Minev, V Minev (Hristov 55), Bodurov, Vidanov, I Popov (Aleksandrov 80), Dyakov, G Milanov (Zlatinski 72), Slavchev (Manolev 55), Nedelev (Gadzhev 55), Galabinov (Rangelov 46).
Belarus: Veremko - Filipenko, Bordachev (Trubilo 84), Verkhovtsov (Aleksiyevich 76), A Hleb (Krivets 46), Putsilo, Zhavnerchik (Veretsilo 59), Kalachev, Kislyak (Oleknovich 62), Dragun, Rodionov (Skavysh 79).

Mar 5 - Martigues, France
Burkina Faso 1 (A Traore pen 17)
Comoros 1 (Mchangama pen 50)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 3,000. **Ref:** Ennjimi (Fra)
Sent off: Balima (Burkina Faso) 49min

SLOVAKIA

Third for Hamsik

Napoli midfielder Marek Hamsik was named Slovak player of the year for a third time. The 26-year-old, who won the award in 2009 and 2010, finished ahead of Liverpool defender Martin Skrtel and Genoa's Juraj Kucka. Catania's Norbert Gyomber was the best young player.


Almeria-bound...Dangda

THAILAND

Striker off to Spain

Muang Thong United's Teerasil Dangda will become the first Thai to play in Spain when he joins Almeria next season.

The international striker will initially arrive on loan, with Almeria – who are currently 17th in La Liga – having an option to buy the 25-year-old outright.

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

Carter heart attack

International striker Kevon Carter has died of a suspected heart attack.

The 30-year-old complained of chest pains after training with his club side, Defence Force, and was taken to the Seventh Day Adventist Community Hospital in Trinidad, where he later passed away.

Chest pains...Carter

Mar 5 - Bujumbura
Burundi 1 (Ntibazonkiza 25)
Rwanda 1 (Ndahinduka 15)
HT: 1-1

Mar 5 - Barcelona, Spain
Colombia 1 (Rodriguez pen 20)
Tunisia 1 (Khazri 35)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 5,000. **Ref:** Estrada Fernandez (Spa)
Colombia: Ospina (Mondragon 46) - S Arias, L Perea, Yepes (Aguilar 46), Armero (Balanta 66), Cuadrado (Torres 75), Valencia, A Ramirez, Rodriguez, Ibarbo (Ramos 26), Bacca (Gutierrez 46). *Sent off: L Perea 82min.*
Tunisia: Ben Mustapha - H Mathlouthi, Yacoubi, S Ben Youssef, Jemal (Maaloul 89), Mikari (Nater 90+3), Ragued, Sassi, Khazri (Khelifa 46), Z Dhaouadi (Yahia 77), Jemaa (F Ben Youssef 46).

Mar 5 - San Jose
Costa Rica 2 (Campbell 42, Saborio 72)
Paraguay 1 (Gomez 87)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 10,000. **Ref:** Castro (Hnd)
Costa Rica: Navas - Gamboa, G Gonzalez, Diaz, Umana, Miller (Duarte 46), Borges (Barrantes 69), Tejeda (Cubero 46), B Ruiz (J Ruiz 75), Campbell (Saborio 46), Urena (Calvo 57).
Paraguay: Fernandez - D Ortiz, Gomez, Moreira, Alonso (Mencia 70), C Riveros, V Caceres (Dos Santos 46), E Benitez (Rojas 46), Perez (Ayala 65), Haedo Valdez (Recalde 66), Velazquez (D Gonzalez 60).

Mar 5 - Nicosia
Cyprus 0
Northern Ireland 0
Ref: Liany (Isr)
Cyprus: Georgallides - Charis Kyriakou, Dossa Junior, Merkis, Antoniades, Nicolaou (Artymatas 58), Laban (Charalambous Kyriakou 67), Makrides (Charalambidis 64), Christofi (Makris 85), Aloneftis (Efrem 51), Mitidis.
Northern Ireland: Mannus (Carroll 46) - Cathcart, McGivern, McAuley, Bruce, Davis, Norwood (McCourt 74), McGinn (Ferguson 73), Brunt, Ward (McKay 63; McArdle 80), Paterson (K Lafferty 46). *Sent off: McAuley 75min.*

Mar 5 - Prague
Czech Republic 2 (Rosicky 11, Vydra 39)
Norway 2 (Elyounoussi 21, Gamst Pedersen 88)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 17,039. **Ref:** Cakir (Tur)
Czech Republic: Cech - Rajtoral (Gebre Selassie 46), Suchy, Mazuch (M Kadlec 46), Limbersky (Pudil 61), Hubschman, Dockal (Husbauer 72), Rosicky (Kolar 46), Darida, Hlousek (Lafata 46), Vydra.
Norway: Nyland - Elabdellaoue, Hangeland, Forren (Nordtveit 46), Hogli, Skjelbred (Gamst Pedersen 64), Jenssen, Johansen (Tettey 46), Elyounoussi, Daehli (Braaten 73), Abdellaoue (Nielsen 61).

Mar 5 - London
Ecuador 4 (Martinez 57, Castillo pen 60, E Valencia 76, Mendez 90+1)
Australia 3 (Cahill 8, 32, Jedinak pen 16)
HT: 0-3
Ecuador: A Bone (Dominguez 46) - Ramirez (Paredes 46), Guagua, Achilier (Erazo 46), Bagui (Martinez 46), Noboa, Castillo, A Valencia, W Ayovi, F Caicedo (Montero 46), E Valencia (Mendez 90).
Australia: Ryan (Langerak 46) - Franjic, Spiranovic, Good (Wilkinson 68), Davidson, Jedinak, Milligan, Rogic (Jones 59), Leckie, Oar (Vidosic 68), Cahill (Bozanic 68). *Sent off: Langerak 58min.*

Mar 5 - London
England 1 (Sturridge 82)
Denmark 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 68,573. **Ref:** Blom (Hol)
England: Hart - Johnson, Cahill, Smalling, Cole (Shaw 46), Wilshere (Lallana 59), Henderson (Oxlade-Chamberlain 77), Gerrard, Sterling (Townsend 86), Rooney (Welbeck 60), Sturridge (Milner 88).
Denmark: Schmeichel - Sloth (Zimling 62), Agger, Kjaer (Bjelland 62), P Ankersen, Kvist, Jacobsen (Juelsgaard 46), J Poulsen (Olsen 81), Krohn-Dehli, Larsen (Kusk 46), Bendtner (M Rasmussen 62).

Mar 5 - Paris
France 2 (Benzema 32, Matuidi 41)
Holland 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 80,000. **Ref:** Atkinson (Eng)
France: Lloris - Debuchy (Sagna 87), Varane, Mangala, Evra (Digne 46), Pogba (Sissoko 81), Cabaye, Matuidi, Valbuena (Ribery 63), Benzema (Giroud 81), Griezmann (Remy 68).
Holland: Cillessen - Van der Wiel, Vlaar, Martins Indi, Blind (Rekik 52), Sneijder (Klaassen 72), Clasie, Strootman (Schaars 39), Promes, Van Persie, Boetius (Depay 72).

Mar 5 - Tbilisi
Georgia 2 (Chanturia 25, Ananidze 76)
Liechtenstein 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 6,000. **Ref:** Treimanis (Lat)
Georgia: Loria - Lobjanidze, Khubutia (S Kvirkvelia 77), Kashia, Grigalava (D Kvirkvelia 46), Kankava, Ebralidze (Kazaishvili 46), Kobakhidze (Daushvili 46), Ananidze, Okriashvili (Dvalishvili 79), Chanturia (Tskhadadze 60).
Liechtenstein: Bicer - Yildiz, Stocklasa, Kaufmann, Burgmeier, M Buchel, A Christen, Erne (Eberle 70), N Hasler, Wolfinger (Gur 87), Frick (M Christen 46).

Mar 5 - Stuttgart
Germany 1 (Gotze 16)
Chile 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 54,449. **Ref:** Clattenburg (Eng)
Germany: Neuer - Grosskreutz, Mertesacker, Boateng, Jansen (Schmelzer 24), Lahm, Schweinsteiger, Ozil (Ginter 89), Kroos, Gotze (Podolski 83), Klose (Schurrle 46).
Chile: Herrera - Medel, Silva (M Gonzalez 83), Jara, Gutierrez, Isla, Aranguiz (Orellana 80), Beausejour (Valdivia 76), Vidal (M Fernandez 90), Sanchez, Vargas (Pinilla 86).

Mar 5 - Gibraltar
Gibraltar 0
Estonia 2 (Kruglov 10, Hunt 80)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Hunter (NI)
Gibraltar: Perez - R Casciaro, Santos, Artell, Higginbotham (Reoch 88), R Chipolina, Payas (J-P Duarte 67), J Chipolina (Sergeant 90+3), Guilling (D Duarte 61), Walker, Priestley (K Casciaro 46).
Estonia: Pareiko - Jaager (Podholjuzin 88), Morozov (Reintam 79), Klavan, Teniste, Kruglov (Kallaste 87), Mosnikov (Antonov 73), Mets, Vassiljev, Kink (Puri 65), Hunt.

Mar 5 - Piraeus
Greece 0
South Korea 2 (Park Chu-young 18, Son Heung-min 54)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 54,133. **Ref:** Hategan (Rom)
Greece: Glykos - Torosidis (Tzavellas 82), Manolas, Katsouranis, Maniatis (Karagounis 46), Tziolis (D Papadopoulos 59), Holebas, A Papadopoulos, Samaras, Mitroglou (Fetfatzidis 59), Salpigidis (Christodoulopoulos 46).
South Korea: Jung Sung-ryong - Lee Yong, Kim Jin-soo, Kim Young-gwon, Hong Jeong-ho, Ki Sung-yueng (Ha Dae-sung 86), Han Kook-young, Koo Ja-cheol (Lee Keun-ho 84), Lee Chung-yong, Son Heung-min (Kim Bo-kyung 73), Park Chu-young (Kim Shin-wook 46).

Mar 5 - San Pedro Sula
Honduras 2 (Bengtson 7, Jerry Palacios 50)
Venezuela 1 (Otero 21)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Bejarano (CR)
Honduras: Valladares - Williams (Acosta 46), Bernardez, Figueroa, Izaguirre, A Peralta, O Garcia (Quioto 46), Claros (Delgado 46), Najar (Garrido 80), Bengtson (R Martinez 46), Jerry Palacios (Reyes 62).
Venezuela: Morales - Vizcarrondo, A Flores, Otero (Guerra 71), Jimenez (Figuera 84), Aristeguieta (Rivas 67), Orozco (Cure 54), Seijas (Ramirez 76), Rosales, Perozo, A Gonzalez.

Mar 5 - Gyor
Hungary 1 (Rudolf 13)
Finland 2 (Pohjanpalo 74, R Eremenko pen 84)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 14,000. **Ref:** Harkam (Aut)
Hungary: Bogdan - Vanczak, Juhasz, Liptak (Kadar 56), Leandro, J Varga (Szakaly 87), Lovrencsics (Gyurcso 53), Koman (Futacs 64), Sandor (Elek 55), Dzsudzsak, Rudolf (Nikolics 82).
Finland: Maenpaa - Arkivuo, Ojala, Moisander, Sorsa (Toivio 88), Kolehmainen (Ring 70), Sparv, P Hetemaj, Riski (Pohjanpalo 64), R Eremenko (Mattila 90), Pukki (Sadik 89).

Mar 5 - Margao
India 2 (Chhetri 14, 89)
Bangladesh 2 (Chowdhury 52, Biswas 64)
HT: 1-0
Sent off: Paul (India) 90+2min

Mar 5 - Tehran
Iran 1 (Ghoochannejhad 55)
Guinea 2 (Constant 34, Ibrahima Traore 37)
HT: 0-2
Iran: Davari (Haghighi 76) - Montazeri (Beitashour 46), Hosseini, Sadeghi, Pouladi, Hadadifar (Hajsafi 84), Nekounam, Dejagah (Ansarifard 84), Jabari (Heydary 46), Shojaei (Jahanbakhsh 46), Ghoochannejhad.

Mar 5 - Tel Aviv
Israel 1 (Buzaglo 80)
Slovakia 3 (Jakubko 37, Durica 69, Mak 83)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 6,500. **Ref:** Dingert (Ger)
Israel: Harush - Meshumar, Ben Haim, Gershon, Ben Harush (Dgani 46), Natcho, Biton (Ezra 72), Refaelov (Buzaglo 58), Zahavi (Melikson 58), Ben Basat (Sahar 82), Damari (Barda 69).
Slovakia: Mucha - Pekarik, Skrtel (Svento 67), Durica, Hubocan, Gyomber (Kiss 86), Stefanik (Nemec 46), Sestak (Mak 46), Hamsik, Weiss (Stoch 46), Jakubko (Holosko 46).

Mar 5 - Tokyo
Japan 4 (Okazaki 4, 17, Kagawa pen 7, Morishige 11)
New Zealand 2 (Wood 39, 80)
HT: 4-1. **Att:** 47,670. **Ref:** Milliner (Aus)
Japan: Kawashima - H Sakai (G Sakai 46), Morishige, Nagatomo, Yoshida, Aoyama (Endo 46), Honda, Kagawa (Saito 79), Yamaguchi (Hosogai 46), Okazaki (Kiyotake 46), Osako (Toyota 80).
New Zealand: Moss - Tuiloma (Sigmund 58), Roux (Howieson 69), Boxall, Durante, McGlinchey (James 58), Thomas (Fallon 82), Payne, Boyd, Barbarouses (Brockie 68), Wood.

Mar 5 - Antalya, Turkey
Lithuania 1 (Vicius 4)
Kazakhstan 1 (Zhumaskaliev 69)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Vilkov (Rus)
Lithuania: Arlauskis - Borovskij (Freidgeimas 78), Zaliukas, Kijanskas, Vaitkunas, Vicius, Panka, Cernych (Mikoliunas 53), Kalonas (Petravicius 72), Novikovas, Spalvis (Stankevicius 59).
Kazakhstan: Sidelnikov (Mokin 46) - Dmitrenko, Engel (Ostapenko 46), Logvinenko, Schmidtgal (Nuserbayev 46), Korobkin, Baizhanov (Nurgaliev 71), Shomko, Dzholchiev, Schetkin (Zhumaskaliev 46), Finonchenko (Malyi 83).

Mar 5 - Luxembourg
Luxembourg 0
Cape Verde Islands 0
Att: 3,885. **Ref:** Vertenten (Blg)
Luxembourg: Joubert - Jans, Schnell, Chanot, Janisch, Hoffmann (Deville 55), Payal, Gerson, Da Mota, Joachim, Turpel (Bastos 46).
Cape Verde: Vozinha - Carlitos, Kay, Nivaldo, Calu, Fernando Varela, Odair Fortes (Sita 79), Babanco (Te 90), Platini (Rodrigues 65), Djaniny (Julio Tavares 77), Heldon (Ryan Mendes 60).

Mar 5 - Skopje
Macedonia 2 (Kostovski 29, A Ibraimi pen 72)
Latvia 1 (Georgievski og 65)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 4,000. **Ref:** Jemini (Alb)
Macedonia: Pacovski - Georgievski, G Popov, Shikov (Ristevski 77), Trickovski (Velkoski 80), Demiri (Spirovski 64), A Ibraimi, Hasani (Ivanovski 67), Mojsov, Stjepanovikj (Muarem 72), Kostovski (B Ibraimi 60).
Latvia: Vanins - Rode, Bulvitis, Gabovs, Sabala (E Visnakovs 64), Rudnevs, Gorkss, Rugins (Lazdins 76), Zjuzins, Fertovs (A Visnakovs 83), Kurakins.

Mar 5 - Blantyre
Malawi 1 (Nyondo 50)
Zimbabwe 4 (Moyo 20, Mahachi 54, Manhanga 71, Nkhata 80)
HT: 0-1

Mar 5 - Nouakchott
Mauritania 1
Niger 1
HT: 1-0

Mar 5 - Atlanta, USA
Mexico 0
Nigeria 0
Att: 68,212
Mexico: G Ochoa - Reyes (F Rodriguez 63), Moreno, Aguilar, Marquez, Herrera (Vazquez 84), Guardado, J C Medina (Pena 63), Montes (Aquino 46), J Hernandez (Pulido 46), Peralta (R Jimenez 70).
Nigeria: Enyeama (Ejide 46) - Oboabona, Echiejile, Omeruo, Ambrose (Azeez 46), Musa (Obinna 60), Mikel, Moses (Ezekiel 70), Onazi, Emenike, Uchebo (Balogun 46; Egwuekwe 65).

Mar 5 - Podgorica
Montenegro 1 (Damjanovic pen 1)
Ghana 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 5,500. **Ref:** Glodovic (Ser)
Montenegro: M Bozovic - Volkov (Igumanovic 78), Vukcevic (Nikolic 65), Basa (Pavicevic 46), Tomasevic, Savic, Drincic, V Bozovic, Kasalica (Vesovic 72), Boskovic (Zverotic 55), Damjanovic (Beciraj 67).
Ghana: Kwarasey - Opare, Boye, Akaminko, Addy (Inkoom 46), Wakaso (Adomah 46), Essien (K Asamoah 66), Agyemang-Badu (Muntari 46), Atsu (Gyan 76), Waris, J Ayew (K-P Boateng 58).

World Service

UKRAINE

Under-21s' CIS win

The national under-21 side won the Commonwealth of Independent States Cup, beating Russia 4-0 in the Final with goals from Taras Puchkovskyi, Serhiy Vakulenko, Redvan Memeshev and Andriy Totovytskyi.

Runners-up last year, this time they beat Estonia, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in the group stage, plus Lithuania and Belarus in the knockout stage before overcoming the host nation in Saint Petersburg.

VIETNAM

Banned til next year

International centre-half Tran Dinh Dong has been banned for 28 games after he broke an opponent's leg. The suspension means that the 26-year-old will not play again for his club side, Song Lam Nghe An, in the V.League until 2015.

"The punishment is meant to be a warning to players throughout the nation, where violent behaviour on the field has gradually become more popular," read a statement from the Vietnamese FA.

Year out...Dinh Dong

68,212 watched Mexico and Nigeria draw 0-0 at the Georgia Dome – the largest football crowd ever in Atlanta

Mar 5 - Marrakech
Morocco 1 (El Arabi pen 27)
Gabon 1 (Evouna 61)
HT: 1-0

Mar 5 - Maputo
Mozambique 1 (Helder Pelembe 65)
Angola 1 (Vado 22)
HT: 0-1

Mar 5 - Windhoek
Namibia 1 (Nekundi 90)
Tanzania 1 (Martin og 85)
HT: 0-0

Mar 5 - Warsaw
Poland 0
Scotland 1 (Brown 77)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 41,652. **Ref:** Bieri (Swi)
Poland: Szczesny - Piszczek, Szukala, Glik, Brzyski (Komorowski 90), Sobota (Maslowski 89), Krychowiak (Jodlowiec 88), Klich (Teodorczyk 82), Obraniak (Robak 74), Peszko (Polanski 74), Milik.
Scotland: Marshall - Hutton (Robertson 67), Martin, Greer, Mulgrew, Bannan (Bardsley 67), Brown, Morrison (D Fletcher 46), McCormack (Adam 77), Anya (Burke 90), S Fletcher (Naismith 46).

Mar 5 - Leiria
Portugal 5 (Cristiano Ronaldo 21, 83, Raul Meireles 66, Fabio Coentrao 67, Edinho 77)
Cameroon 1 (Aboubakar 43)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Marriner (Eng)
Portugal: Beto (Eduardo 46) - Joao Pereira, Rolando, Neto, Fabio Coentrao, Joao Moutinho, William Carvalho (Miguel Veloso 76), Raul Meireles, Ivan Cavaleiro (Varela 69), Cristiano Ronaldo (Josue 87), Rafa Silva (Edinho 46; Antunes 81).
Cameroon: Itandje (Ndy Assembe 46) - Nyom, Chedjou (Nounkeu 72), N'Koulou (Kana-Biyik 46), Assou-Ekotto, Enoh, Song, Makoun (Matip 72), Aboubakar (Bedimo 63), Eto'o, Choupo-Moting (Idrissou 90).

Mar 5 - Dublin
Republic of Ireland 1 (Long 8)
Serbia 2 (McCarthy og 48, Djordjevic 60)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 37,595. **Ref:** Kassai (Hun)
Rep Ireland: Forde - Coleman, R Keogh, Wilson, Ward (Clark 64), McGeady (D Murphy 73), McCarthy (Meyler 61), Whelan (Quinn 80), McClean, Hoolahan (Pilkington 61), Long (Walters 72).
Serbia: Stojkovic - Rukavina (Gudelj 89), Bisevac, Ivanovic, Kolarov, Fejsa, Matic, Basta (Z Tosic 59), Tadic (Ljajic 81), Markovic (Sulejmani 75), Djordjevic (Scepovic 87).

Mar 5 - Bucharest
Romania 0
Argentina 0
Att: 45,000
Romania: Tatarusanu (Pantilimon 46) - Matel (Luchin 75), Gardos, D Grigore, Rat, Bourceanu, Pintilii, Chipciu (Grozav 88), Maxim (Torje 46), Tanase (Lazar 56), Marica (Rusescu 67).
Argentina: Romero - Zabaleta, F Fernandez, Basanta, Rojo, Gago (Biglia 57), Mascherano, Di Maria (Maxi Rodriguez 90), Messi, Higuain (Lavezzi 77), Aguero (Palacio 57).

Mar 5 - Krasnodar
Russia 2 (Kokorin 21, Kombarov pen 43)
Armenia 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 20,000. **Ref:** Undiano Mallenco (Spa)
Russia: Akinfeev - Eshchenko (Kozlov 46), V Berezutsky, Ignashevich, Kombarov, Shirokov (Denisov 46), Glushakov, Fayzulin (Dzagoev 46), Samedov (Schennikov 75), Kokorin (Shatov 63), Zhirkov (Kerzhakov 46).
Armenia: Berezovsky - Mkoyan (Hambardzumyan 79), Haroyan, Arzumanyan, Artak Yedigaryan (Hovhannisyan 65), Sarkisov (Artur Yedigaryan 46), Mkrtchyan (Dashyan 62), Pizzelli, Mkhitaryan, Ghazaryan (Papikyan 82), Movsisyan (Adamyan 87).

Mar 5 - Saint-Leu-la-Foret, France
Senegal 1 (S Mane 60)
Mali 1 (Diabate 75)
HT: 0-0
Senegal: C T Ndiaye (Gomis 46) - Cissokho (S Sane 46), Kouyate, Djilobodji, Mbegue (Souare 46), A Ndiaye (Saivet 46), Badji, Diame, D Ndoye (S Mane 46), Sow (P Cisse 46), D Ba.

Mar 5 - Johannesburg
South Africa 0
Brazil 5 (Oscar 10, Neymar 41, 46, 90+2, Fernandinho 79)
HT: 0-2
South Africa: Williams - Ngcongca, Khumalo (Xulu 19), Nthethe, Matlaba, Furman, Jali (Zungu 55), Serero, Claasen (Ndlovu 52), Parker (Patosi 62), Rantie (Manyisa 46).
Brazil: Julio Cesar - Rafinha, David Luiz (Dante 64), Thiago Silva, Marcelo (Daniel Alves 58), Fernandinho, Paulinho (Luiz Gustavo 46), Oscar (Ramires 46), Hulk (Willian 46), Fred (Jo 62), Neymar.

Mar 5 - Madrid
Spain 1 (Pedro 63)
Italy 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 35,000. **Ref:** Aranovskyi (Ukr)
Spain: Casillas (Valdes 46) - Azpilicueta, Javi Martinez, Sergio Ramos (Albiol 65), Jordi Alba, Thiago, Busquets (Xabi Alonso 46), Pedro (Cazorla 81), Fabregas (Silva 46), Iniesta (Jesus Navas 65), Diego Costa.
Italy: Buffon - Maggio (Abate 46), Paletta, Barzagli, Criscito (De Sciglio 46), Montolivo, Thiago Motta (Giaccherini 61), Marchisio, Cerci (Immobile 68), Osvaldo (Destro 68), Candreva (Pirlo 46).

Mar 5 - Gros Islet
St Lucia 0
Jamaica 5 (Seaton 16, Mattocks 18, 69, McCleary 35, Brown 82)
HT: 0-3

Mar 5 - St Gallen
Switzerland 2 (Drmic 34, 41)
Croatia 2 (Olic 40, 54)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Hugo Miguel (Por)
Switzerland: Benaglio - Lichtsteiner (Lang 62), Djourou, Von Bergen, Rodriguez, Shaqiri (Mehmedi 46), Behrami (Schwegler 46), Inler (Dzemaili 62), Stocker (Barnetta 79), Xhaka (Gavranovic 79), Drmic.
Croatia: Subasic - Srna, Corluka, Lovren (Schildenfeld 56), Pranjic, Rakitic (Vukojevic 88), Males (Modric 56), Perisic (Milic 75), Olic, Jelavic (Mandzukic 46), Kovacic (Eduardo 56).

Mar 5 - Ankara
Turkey 2 (Erdinc 2, Olcan 57)
Sweden 1 (Toivonen 54)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 19,200. **Ref:** Mazic (Ser)
Turkey: Onur - Semih, Alper (Murat 46), Gokhan Gonul, Selcuk Inan (Olcay 67), Sahin (Osman 90+1), Arda (Ugur 90), Burak (Olcan 46), Caner, Erdinc (Umut 84), Ersan.
Sweden: Dahlin - P Bengtsson, Antonsson (Ekstrand 46), S Larsson, Ekdal, Kacaniklic, Ibrahimovic (Toivonen 46), R Bengtsson (P Nilsson 46), Wernbloom (Hiljemark 84), Berg (Elmander 46), Durmaz (Tankovic 67).

Mar 5 - Larnaca, Cyprus
Ukraine 2 (Yarmolenko 12, Devic 68)
United States 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 1,573. **Ref:** Trattou (Cyp)
Ukraine: Pyatov - Khacheridi, Tymoshchuk, Kucher, Yarmolenko (Morozyuk 90), Zozulya (Devic 66), Konoplyanka (Husiev 66), Shevchuk (Makarenko 80), Rotan (Edmar 78), Fedetskyi, Harmash (Bezus 46).
United States: Howard - Cameron, Onyewu, Brooks, Castillo (Shea 63), Bedoya, Jones (Williams 80), Dempsey, Kljestan (Johannsson 63), F Johnson, Altidore (Agudelo 85).

Mar 5 - Cardiff
Wales 3 (J Collins 12, Vokes 64, Bale 70)
Iceland 1 (J Gudmundsson 26)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 13,219. **Ref:** Saar (Est)
Wales: Hennessey - Gunter, J Collins (Gabbidon 46), A Williams (Ricketts 64), N Taylor, Huws, Allen, Robson-Kanu (B Davies 88), King (Collison 76), Bale (J Williams 72), Vokes.
Iceland: Halldorsson - A Skulason (K Jonsson 84), T Bjarnason, R Sigurdsson (Ottesen 46), Arnason, J Gudmundsson, G Sigurdsson, A Gunnarsson, Hallfredsson, Sigthorsson (Sverrisson 76), Finnbogason (B Bjarnason 46).

Mar 5 - Ndola
Zambia 2 (Kangwa 65, 76)
Uganda 1 (Kiiza 51)
HT: 0-0

FRIENDLY FIXTURES

Thursday, March 27
Aruba v Guam (Oranjestad)
Sunday, March 30
Aruba v Guam (Oranjestad)
Wednesday, April 2
United States v Mexico (Glendale)
Tuesday, May 13
Germany v Poland (Hamburg)
Saturday, May 17
Holland v Ecuador (Amsterdam)
Sunday, May 18
Belarus v Iran (Vienna, Austria)
Wednesday, May 21
Finland v Czech Republic (Helsinki)
Thursday, May 22
Hungary v Denmark (Debrecen)
Montenegro v Iran (Vienna, Austria)
Sunday, May 25
Portugal v Egypt
Republic of Ireland v Turkey (Dublin)
Monday, May 26
Australia v South Africa (Sydney)
Belgium v Luxembourg (Brussels)
Estonia v Gibraltar (Tallinn)
Macedonia v Cameroon (Kufstein, Austria)
Russia v Slovakia
Serbia v Jamaica (Harrison, USA)
South Korea v Tunisia (Seoul)
Tuesday, May 27
France v Norway (Paris)
Japan v Cyprus (Saitama)
United States v Azerbaijan (San Francisco)
Wednesday, May 28
Denmark v Sweden (Copenhagen)
Scotland v Nigeria (London)
Thursday, May 29
Cameroon v Paraguay (Kufstein, Austria)
Turkey v Honduras (Washington DC, USA)
Friday, May 30
Austria v Iceland (Innsbruck)
Bosnia-Herzegovina v Ivory Coast (St Louis, USA)
Chile v Egypt (Santiago)
England v Peru (London)
Iran v Angola (Vienna, Austria)
Portugal v Greece (Lisbon)
Spain v Bolivia (Seville)
Switzerland v Jamaica (Lucerne)
Uruguay v Northern Ireland (Montevideo)
Saturday, May 31
Algeria v Armenia (Geneva, Switzerland)
Croatia v Mali
Holland v Ghana (Rotterdam)
Italy v Republic of Ireland
Mexico v Ecuador (Arlington, USA)
Norway v Russia (Oslo)
Panama v Serbia (Bridgeview, USA)
Portugal v Greece
Sunday, June 1
France v Paraguay (Nice)
Germany v Cameroon (Monchengladbach)
Honduras v Israel (Houston, USA)
Sweden v Belgium (Stockholm)
United States v Turkey (Harrison)
Monday, June 2
Costa Rica v Japan (USA)
Tuesday, June 3
Brazil v Panama (Goiania)
Czech Republic v Austria (Olomouc)
Greece v Nigeria (Chester, USA)
Mexico v Bosnia-Herzegovina (Chicago, USA)
Switzerland v Peru (Lucerne)
Wednesday, June 4
Algeria v Romania (Geneva, Switzerland)
Argentina v Trinidad & Tobago (La Plata)
Chile v Northern Ireland (Valparaiso)
El Salvador v Ivory Coast (Frisco, USA)
England v Ecuador (Miami, USA)
Holland v Wales (Amsterdam)
Hungary v Albania
Italy v Luxembourg
Uruguay v Slovenia (Montevideo)
Friday, June 6
Brazil v Serbia (Sao Paulo)
Croatia v Australia (Brazil)
Germany v Armenia (Mainz)
Greece v Bolivia (Harrison, USA)
Mexico v Portugal (Foxboro, USA)
Russia v Morocco (Moscow)
Saturday, June 7
Argentina v Slovenia (Buenos Aires)
Belgium v Tunisia (Brussels)
El Salvador v Spain (Washington DC, USA)
England v Honduras (Miami, USA)
Hungary v Kazakhstan
Trinidad & Tobago v Iran (Sao Paulo, Brazil)
United States v Nigeria (Jacksonville)
Sunday, June 8
France v Jamaica (Lille)
Tuesday, June 10
Republic of Ireland v Portugal (New York, USA)

KEY TO TABLES
(Q) = qualified for next stage

ESM TEAM OF THE MONTH FEBRUARY 2014

European Sports Media

HOW IT WORKS

Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Media group select their first XI based on the best individual performances from Europe's top competitions. For details of how each ESM member voted, visit worldsoccer.com/esm11

SEASON RANKINGS

Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

Manuel Neuer (Bayern Munich)	16
Thibaut Courtois (Atletico Madrid)	11
Gianluigi Buffon (Juventus)	6
Vincent Enyeama (Lille)	6
Morgan De Sanctis (Roma)	5
Iker Casillas (Real Madrid)	3
Victor Valdes (Barcelona)	3
Artur Boruc (Southampton)	2
Hugo Lloris (Tottenham Hotspur)	2
Diego Lopez (Real Madrid)	2
Roman Weidenfeller (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Petr Cech (Chelsea)	1
Jasper Cillessen (Ajax)	1
Fraser Forster (Celtic)	1
Samir Handanovic (Internazionale)	1
Joe Hart (Manchester City)	1
Helton (Porto)	1
Tim Krul (Newcastle United)	1
Bernd Leno (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Vito Mannone (Sunderland)	1
Simon Mignolet (Liverpool)	1
Keylor Navas (Levante)	1
Pepe Reina (Napoli)	1
Salvatore Sirigu (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Wojciech Szczesny (Arsenal)	1
Marc-Andre Ter Stegen (Bor M'gladbach)	1

DEFENDERS

David Alaba (Bayern Munich)	20
Mehdi Benatia (Roma)	18
Pepe (Real Madrid)	17
Dante (Bayern Munich)	15
Gerard Pique (Barcelona)	14
Per Mertesacker (Arsenal)	12
Thiago Silva (Paris Saint-Germain)	11
Dani Alves (Barcelona)	9
Branislav Ivanovic (Chelsea)	9
Marcelo (Real Madrid)	8
Gregory Van der Wiel (Paris Saint-Germain)	8
Mats Hummels (Borussia Dortmund)	7
Filipe Luis (Atletico Madrid)	7
Pablo Zabaleta (Manchester City)	6
Andrea Barzagli (Juventus)	5
Jerome Boateng (Bayern Munich)	5
Giorgio Chiellini (Juventus)	5
Diego Godin (Atletico Madrid)	5
Vincent Kompany (Manchester City)	5
Sergio Ramos (Real Madrid)	5
Federico Balzaretti (Roma)	4
Gary Cahill (Chelsea)	4
Laurent Koscielny (Arsenal)	4
Marquinhos (Paris Saint-Germain)	4
Mamadou Sakho (Liverpool)	4
Cesar Azpilicueta (Chelsea)	3
Kevin Grosskreutz (Borussia Dortmund)	3
Juanfran (Atletico Madrid)	3
Maxwell (Paris Saint-Germain)	3
Bacary Sagna (Arsenal)	3
Martin Skrtel (Liverpool)	3
Omer Toprak (Bayer Leverkusen)	3
Leighton Baines (Everton)	2
Leonardo Bonucci (Juventus)	2
Leandro Castan (Roma)	2
Seamus Coleman (Everton)	2
Patrice Evra (Manchester United)	2
Fabinho (Monaco)	2
Kieran Gibbs (Arsenal)	2
Simon Kjaer (Lille)	2
Layvin Kurzawa (Monaco)	2
Stephan Lichtsteiner (Juventus)	2
Maicon (Roma)	2
Kostas Manolas (Olympiakos)	2
Miranda (Atletico Madrid)	2
Rafinha (Bayern Munich)	2
John Terry (Chelsea)	2
Adriano (Barcelona)	1
Alvaro Arbeloa (Real Madrid)	1
Sebastian Boenisch (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Paolo Cannavaro (Napoli)	1
Aly Cissokho (Liverpool)	1
Gael Clichy (Manchester City)	1
Danilo (Porto)	1
Mathieu Debuchy (Newcastle United)	1
Martin Demichelis (Manchester City)	1
Lorenzo De Silvestri (Sampdoria)	1
Aleksandar Kolarov (Manchester City)	1
Luisao (Benfica)	1
Christian Maggio (Napoli)	1
Alberto Moreno (Sevilla)	1
Naldo (Werder Bremen)	1
Andrea Ranocchia (Internazionale)	1
Dario Srna (Shakhtar Donetsk)	1
Neven Subotic (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Vasilis Torosidis (Roma)	1
Ricardo Van Rhijn (Ajax)	1
Kyle Walker (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Kurt Zouma (Saint-Etienne)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Philipp Lahm (Bayern Munich)	23
Arturo Vidal (Juventus)	20
Aaron Ramsey (Arsenal)	17
Mesut Ozil (Arsenal)	16
Yaya Toure (Manchester City)	16
Franck Ribery (Bayern Munich)	13
Eden Hazard (Chelsea)	12
Luka Modric (Real Madrid)	10
Paul Pogba (Juventus)	10
Mario Gotze (Bayern Munich)	6
Toni Kroos (Bayern Munich)	6
Koke (Atletico Madrid)	5
Marco Reus (Borussia Dortmund)	5
Arda Turan (Atletico Madrid)	4
Daniele De Rossi (Roma)	4
Cesc Fabregas (Barcelona)	4
Isco (Real Madrid)	4
Miralem Pjanic (Roma)	4
Arjen Robben (Bayern Munich)	4
Marco Verratti (Paris Saint-Germain)	4
Jack Wilshere (Arsenal)	4
Thiago Alcantara (Bayern Munich)	3
Gareth Bale (Real Madrid)	3
Santi Cazorla (Arsenal)	3
Andrea Pirlo (Juventus)	3
Nuri Sahin (Borussia Dortmund)	3
Xabi Alonso (Real Madrid)	2
Fernandinho (Manchester City)	2
Raul Garcia (Atletico Madrid)	2
Andres Iniesta (Barcelona)	2
Blaise Matuidi (Paris Saint-Germain)	2
Henrikh Mkhitaryan (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Thomas Muller (Bayern Munich)	2
Jesus Navas (Manchester City)	2
Oscar (Chelsea)	2
Ramires (Chelsea)	2
Kevin Strootman (Roma)	2
Theo Walcott (Arsenal)	2
Emre Can (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
William Carvalho (Sporting Lisbon)	1
Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool)	1
Angel Di Maria (Real Madrid)	1
Christian Eriksen (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Steven Gerrard (Liverpool)	1
Marek Hamsik (Napoli)	1
Jordan Henderson (Liverpool)	1
Kaka (Milan)	1
Leandro (Olympiakos)	1
Dries Mertens (Napoli)	1
Marco Pavolo (Parma)	1
James Rodriguez (Monaco)	1
Mohamed Salah (Basle/Chelsea)	1
Bastian Schweinsteiger (Bayern Munich)	1
Wesley Sneijder (Galatasaray)	1
Oliver Torres (Atletico Madrid)	1
Borja Valero (Fiorentina)	1
Xavi (Barcelona)	1

FORWARDS

Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Paris Saint-Germain)	39
Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid)	33
Luis Suarez (Liverpool)	28
Diego Costa (Atletico Madrid)	27
Lionel Messi (Barcelona)	15
Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool)	11
Sergio Aguero (Manchester City)	9
Alvaro Negredo (Manchester City)	8
Neymar (Barcelona)	7
Radamel Falcao (Monaco)	5
Pedro (Barcelona)	4
Wayne Rooney (Manchester United)	4
Samuel Eto'o (Chelsea)	3
Alexis Sanchez (Barcelona)	3
Francesco Totti (Roma)	3
Karim Benzema (Real Madrid)	2
Antoine Griezmann (Real Sociedad)	2
Jese (Real Madrid)	2
Robert Lewandowski (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Fernando Llorente (Juventus)	2
Kostas Mitroglou (Olympiakos/Fulham)	2
Carlos Tevez (Juventus)	2
Emmanuel Adebayor (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Ricardo Alvarez (Internazionale)	1
Domenico Berardi (Sassuolo)	1
Edinson Cavani (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Gervinho (Roma)	1
Olivier Giroud (Arsenal)	1
Adam Johnson (Sunderland)	1
Alexandre Lacazette (Lyon)	1
Mario Mandzukic (Bayern Munich)	1
Adrian Ramos (Hertha Berlin)	1
Rahim Sterling (Liverpool)	1
Fernando Torres (Chelsea)	1

ESM – EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

The members of ESM are: *A Bola* (Portugal), *Elf* (Holland), *Fanatik* (Turkey), *Frankfurter Allegmeine Zeitung* (Germany), *Goal News* (Greece), *Kicker* (Germany), *Marca* (Spain), *Nemzeti Sport* (Hungary), *So Foot* (France), *Sport* (Belgium), *Sport Express* (Russia), *De Telegraaf* (Holland), *TIPSbladet* (Denmark), *World Soccer* (England)

More details of votes at worldsoccer.com/votes

Seeing red...keeper Szczesny

ESTONIA

Positive start for Flora

Having lost the eight previous competitive meetings with their Tallinn rivals, Flora beat reigning league champions Levadia 1-0 to win the Estonian Super Cup for an eighth time. Georgian midfielder Zakaria Beglarishvili clinched victory for the cup holders three minutes from time, ahead of the start of the new league campaign.

"We finished fourth in the last championship and have not had an easy pre-season, so it was important for our young team to start the new season in a positive way," said Flora coach Norbert Hurt.

FRANCE

Substitute mistake

Nantes were punished for fielding a suspended player against Bastia in their opening game of the Ligue 1 season. Their 2-0 win was amended to 0-0.

Midfielder Abdoulaye Toure, who appeared as a substitute, was ineligible to play after collecting three bookings in a three-month period for the club's

100 red cards for Arsenal under Arsene Wenger, following keeper Wojciech Szczesny's dismissal against Bayern Munich

Club Results

EUROPE

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st knockout round

1st legs

Feb 18
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) 0
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) 4 (Matuidi 3, Ibrahimovic pen 39, 42, Cabaye 88)
HT: 0-3. **Att:** 29,412. **Ref:** Kassai (Hun)
Leverkusen: Leno - Hilbert, Spahic, Toprak, Guardado, Rolfes (Reinartz 46), Bender, Castro, Sam (Wollscheid 61), Son (Brandt 46), Kiessling.
Sent off: Spahic 59min.
PSG: Sirigu - Van der Wiel, Alex, Thiago Silva, Maxwell, Thiago Motta, Verratti, Matuidi (Cabaye 67), Lucas Moura, Ibrahimovic, Lavezzi (Pastore 76).

Feb 18
Manchester City (Eng) 0
Barcelona (Spa) 2 (Messi pen 54, Daniel Alves 90)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 46,033. **Ref:** Eriksson (Swe)
Man City: Hart - Zabaleta, Kompany, Demichelis, Clichy, Jesus Navas (Nasri 58), Fernandinho, Toure, Kolarov (Lescott 58), Silva, Negredo (Dzeko 74).
Sent off: Demichelis 53min.
Barcelona: Valdes - Daniel Alves, Pique, Mascherano, Jordi Alba, Busquets, Xavi, Fabregas (Sergi Roberto 86), Sanchez (Neymar 74), Messi, Iniesta.

Feb 19
Arsenal (Eng) 0
Bayern Munich (Ger) 2 (Kroos 54, Muller 88)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 59,911. **Ref:** Rizzoli (Ita)
Arsenal: Szczesny - Sagna, Mertesacker, Koscielny, Gibbs (Monreal 31), Flamini, Wilshere, Oxlade-Chamberlain (Rosicky 74), Ozil, Cazorla (Fabianski 39), Sanogo. *Sent off: Szczesny 37min.*
Bayern: Neuer - Lahm, Boateng (Rafinha 46), Dante, Alaba, Javi Martinez, Gotze, Thiago (Pizarro 79), Kroos, Robben, Mandzukic (Muller 64).

Feb 19
Milan (Ita) 0
Atletico Madrid (Spa) 1 (Diego Costa 83)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 65,890. **Ref:** Proenca (Por)
Milan: Abbiati - De Sciglio (Abate 26), Bonera, Rami, Emanuelson, De Jong, Essien, Poli (Constant 85), Kaka, Taarabt, Balotelli (Pazzini 78).
Atletico: Courtois - Juanfran, Miranda, Godin, Insua, Gabi, Mario Suarez, Arda (Rodriguez 74), Koke, Diego Costa, Raul Garcia (Adrian 80).

Feb 25
Olympiakos (Gre) 2 (Dominguez 38, Campbell 55)
Manchester United (Eng) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 29,815. **Ref:** Rocchi (Ita)
Olympiakos: Roberto - Leandro Salino, Manolas, Marcano, Holebas, Maniatis, N'Dinga, Campbell (David Fuster 67), Dominguez (Paulo Machado 76), Perez (Haedo Valdez 86), Olaitan.
Man Utd: De Gea - Smalling, Ferdinand, Vidic, Evra, Cleverley (Kagawa 60), Carrick, Valencia (Welbeck 60), Rooney, Young, Van Persie.

Feb 25
Zenit St Petersburg (Rus) 2 (Shatov 57, Hulk pen 69)
Borussia Dortmund (Ger) 4 (Mkhitaryan 4, Reus 5, Lewandowski 61, 71)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 15,099. **Ref:** Collum (Sco)
Zenit: Lodygin - Anyukov (Smolnikov 84), Neto, Lombaerts, Criscito, Witsel, Fayzulin (Kerzhakov 84), Hulk, Shatov, Arshavin (Tymoshchuk 15), Rondon.
Dortmund: Weidenfeller - Piszczek, Friedrich, Papastathopoulos, Schmelzer, Kehl, Sahin, Reus (Hofmann 85), Mkhitaryan (Aubameyang 70), Grosskreutz (Durm 90+1), Lewandowski.

Feb 26
Galatasaray (Tur) 1 (Chedjou 65)
Chelsea (Eng) 1 (Fernando Torres 9)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 49,194. **Ref:** Velasco Carballo (Spa)
Galatasaray: Muslera - Eboue, Chedjou, Hakan (Semih 46), Alex Telles, Felipe Melo, Selcuk, Hajrovic (Yekta 31), Sneijder, Burak, Drogba (Umut 80).
Chelsea: Cech - Ivanovic, Terry, Cahill, Azpilicueta, Ramires, Lampard, Willian, Hazard (Oscar 90+1), Fernando Torres (Eto'o 68), Schurrle (Mikel 67).

Feb 26
Schalke (Ger) 1 (Huntelaar 90+1)
Real Madrid (Spa) 6 (Benzema 13, 57, Bale 21, 69, Cristiano Ronaldo 52, 89)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 54,442. **Ref:** Webb (Eng)
Schalke: Fahrmann - Howedes, Matip, Felipe Santana, Kolasinac (Fuchs 76), Boateng (Goretzka 59), Neustadter, Farfan (Obasi 72), Meyer, Draxler, Huntelaar.
Real Madrid: Casillas - Carvajal, Pepe, Sergio Ramos, Marcelo, Xabi Alonso (Illarramendi 73), Modric, Di Maria (Isco 68), Bale (Jese 80), Cristiano Ronaldo, Benzema.

EUROPA LEAGUE

1st knockout round

1st legs - Feb 20; 2nd legs - Feb 27

Ajax* (Hol) v Salzburg (Aut) 0-3, 1-3 (agg 1-6)
Anzhi Makhachkala (Rus) v Genk (Blg)
0-0, 2-0 (agg 2-0)
Betis (Spa) v Rubin Kazan (Rus) 1-1, 2-0 (agg 3-1)
Chornomorets (Ukr) v Lyon (Fra) 0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1)
Dnipro (Ukr) v Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
1-0, 1-3 (agg 2-3)
Dynamo Kiev (Ukr) v Valencia (Spa) 0-2, 0-0 (agg 0-2)
Esbjerg (Den) v Fiorentina (Ita) 1-3, 1-1 (agg 2-4)
Juventus* (Ita) v Trabzonspor (Tur) 2-0, 2-0 (agg 4-0)
Lazio (Ita) v Ludogorets (Bul) 0-1, 3-3 (agg 3-4)
Maccabi Tel Aviv (Isr) v Basle* (Swi)
0-0, 0-3 (agg 0-3)
Maribor (Sln) v Sevilla (Spa) 2-2, 1-2 (agg 3-4)
PAOK Salonika (Gre) v Benfica* (Por)
0-1, 0-3 (agg 0-4)
Porto* (Por) v Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger)
2-2, 3-3 (agg 5-5, Porto on away goals)
Slovan Liberec (CzR) v AZ Alkmaar (Hol)
0-1, 1-1 (agg 1-2)
Swansea City (Wal) v Napoli* (Ita) 0-0, 1-3 (agg 1-3)
Viktoria Plzen* (CzR) v Shakhtar Donetsk* (Ukr)
1-1, 2-1 (agg 3-2)
**Entered competition at this stage after finishing 3rd in a Champions League group*

AUSTRIA

Feb 8: Salzburg 6 Grodig 0; Ried 2 Wiener Neustadt 1; Wolfsberger 3 Wacker 2; Admira 1 Sturm 1.
Feb 9: Rapid 3 Austria 1.
Feb 15: Sturm 1 Salzburg 4; Grodig 3 Wolfsberger 0; Wacker 1 Ried 1; Austria 1 Wiener Neustadt 1.
Feb 16: Admira 2 Rapid 1.
Feb 22: Ried 2 Sturm 2; Wolfsberger 0 Austria 0; Rapid 0 Grodig 0; Wiener Neustadt 1 Wacker 0.
Feb 23: Salzburg 6 Admira 1.
Mar 1: Austria 2 Wacker 1; Grodig 1 Wiener Neustadt 2; Sturm 1 Wolfsberger 4; Admira 2 Ried 2.
Mar 2: Salzburg 6 Rapid 3.

AUSTRIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Salzburg	25	19	4	2	85	22	61
Grodig	25	11	6	8	50	46	39
Austria	25	9	8	8	41	34	35
Rapid	25	9	8	8	41	34	35
Ried	25	8	11	6	41	42	35
Wolfsberger	25	8	8	9	39	43	32
W Neustadt	25	7	8	10	31	56	29
Sturm	25	7	7	11	35	43	28
Admira[1]	25	7	6	12	35	52	22
Wacker	25	3	8	14	30	56	17

36-round season (9x4); bottom team will be relegated
[1]5pts deducted for breaching licensing regulations

BELGIUM

Regular season

Feb 8: Kortrijk 2 Anderlecht 2; Oostende 0 Gent 0; OH Leuven 0 Mechelen 0; Lokeren 3 Charleroi 1; Mons 1 Lierse 5; Cercle Brugge 0 Waasland-B 0.
Feb 9: Standard 2 Zulte Waregem 0; Genk 1 Club Brugge 3.
Feb 14: Club Brugge 3 Kortrijk 1.
Feb 15: Charleroi 0 Standard 1; Zulte Waregem 2 Cercle Brugge 1; Mechelen 1 Oostende 1; Lierse 0 Genk 1; Waasland-Beveren 1 OH Leuven 0.
Feb 16: Gent 1 Lokeren 1; Anderlecht 2 Mons 0.
Feb 21: Lokeren 2 Anderlecht 1.
Feb 22: Oostende 3 Lierse 2; Charleroi 3 Z Waregem 2; Kortrijk 1 Mons 2; Cercle Brugge 3 Mechelen 2.
Feb 23: OH Leuven 2 Club Brugge 5; Standard 2 Gent 3; Genk 0 Waasland-Beveren 2.
Feb 28: Mechelen 1 Lokeren 0.
Mar 1: Gent 2 Charleroi 1; Kortrijk 4 Cercle Brugge 0; Lierse 0 OH Leuven 0; Mons 3 Oostende 0; Waasland-Beveren 2 Zulte Waregem 2.
Mar 2: Club B'ge 1 Standard 0; Anderlecht 2 Genk 0.

BELGIUM – REGULAR	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Standard	28	19	6	3	56	16	63
Club Brugge	28	18	5	5	51	27	59
Anderlecht	28	17	3	8	57	30	54
Z Waregem	28	13	10	5	49	37	49
Lokeren	28	14	5	9	46	30	47
Genk	28	13	2	13	37	36	41
Gent	28	11	8	9	35	35	41
Kortrijk	28	10	7	11	40	42	37
Oostende	28	9	6	13	28	42	33
Cercle Brugge	28	9	6	13	28	49	33
Lierse	28	9	4	15	34	50	31
Mechelen	28	8	7	13	34	46	31
Charleroi	28	7	9	12	32	40	30
Waasland-B	28	6	11	11	27	34	29
OH Leuven	28	5	9	14	27	44	24
Mons	28	5	4	19	25	48	19

30-round regular season (15x2); top 6 will form championship group, 7th to 14th will enter Europa League-place play-offs, 15th & 16th (bottom 2) will meet in the relegation play-off series (the loser going down, the winner entering rel/prom play-offs)

CZECH REPUBLIC

Feb 21: Dukla 3 Teplice 1.
Feb 22: Znojmo 0 Jihlava 0; Pribram 1 Bohemians 1905 0; Slovacko 1 Jablonec 0; Olomouc 5 Slavia 1.
Feb 23: Ostrava 1 Plzen 2; Liberec 2 Mlada Boleslav 2.
Feb 24: Sparta 4 Brno 0.
Feb 28: Slavia 2 Dukla 1.
Mar 1: Bohemians 1905 1 Sparta 2.
Mar 2: Teplice 4 Olomouc 0; Brno 1 Pribram 0; Jablonec 1 Ostrava 0; Jihlava 2 Liberec 3; Plzen 3 Znojmo 2.
Mar 3: Mlada Boleslav 2 Slovacko 0.

CZECH REPUBLIC	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sparta	18	15	3	0	47	12	48
Plzen	18	13	4	1	42	15	43
Teplice	18	9	4	5	40	22	31
M Boleslav	18	8	6	4	36	21	30
Dukla	18	8	6	4	23	16	30
Liberec	18	8	5	5	21	23	29
Jablonec	18	7	4	7	31	29	25
Slovacko	18	6	4	8	26	29	22
Olomouc	18	5	5	8	31	35	20
Slavia	18	5	4	9	15	34	19
Znojmo	18	4	6	8	20	26	18
Brno	18	5	3	10	20	30	18
Pribram	18	5	3	10	19	34	18
Jihlava	18	4	4	10	23	34	16
Ostrava	18	3	6	9	15	34	15
Boh'ians 1905	18	3	5	10	15	30	14

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

DENMARK

Feb 21: Vestsjaelland 0 SonderjyskE 4.
Feb 22: OB 2 Midtjylland 1.
Feb 23: Viborg 1 Randers 1; AGF 1 Copenhagen 1; Brondby 2 AaB 2.
Feb 24: Esbjerg 2 Nordsjaelland 1.
Feb 28: Nordsjaelland 2 Viborg 0.
Mar 1: SonderjyskE 1 AGF 2.
Mar 2: Esbjerg 1 OB 0; AaB 0 Vestsjaelland 0; Randers 0 Brondby 1; Copenhagen 1 Midtjylland 5.

DENMARK	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Midtjylland	20	11	6	3	38	19	39
AaB	20	9	7	4	34	22	34
Copenhagen	20	8	7	5	36	27	31
Brondby	20	7	8	5	26	24	29
Nordsjaelland	20	7	5	8	23	27	26
AGF	20	7	5	8	28	35	26
Esbjerg	20	7	4	9	32	29	25
OB	20	6	7	7	30	28	25
Randers	20	5	9	6	25	29	24
Viborg	20	5	7	8	29	37	22
Vestsjaelland	20	5	7	8	20	30	22
SonderjyskE	20	5	4	11	22	36	19

33-round season (11x3); bottom 2 will be relegated

ENGLAND

Saturday, February 8

Aston Villa 0
West Ham 2 (Nolan 46, 48) Att: 36,261

Chelsea 3 (Hazard 27, 34, pen 63)
Newcastle 0 Att: 41,387

Crystal Palace 3 (Ince 15, Ledley 27, Chamakh pen 69)
West Bromwich 1 (Bifouma 46) Att: 24,501

under-19 side.

League leaders Paris Saint-Germain beat Nantes 2-1 in the League Cup semi-finals and face Lyon in the Final on April 18.

GREECE

Derby fright for striker

Olympiakos striker Michael Olaitan was rushed to hospital after collapsing on the pitch during the first half of the Athens derby at home to Panathinaikos. The 21-year-old Nigerian regained consciousness before being taken away for tests.

"His heart function is fine," said club doctor Christos Theos. "Perhaps the main reason was a viral infection that has been plaguing the player."

Runaway championship leaders Olympiakos suffered their first league defeat of the season, going down 3-0 to Pana.

Worrying...Olaitan is stretchered from the pitch after he collapsed

ITALY

Bari going bankrupt

Serie B side Bari are to seek voluntary bankruptcy in order to avoid the club disappearing altogether as current owners, the Matarrese family, can no longer cover existing debts.

Liverpool 5 (Skrtel 1, 10, Sterling 16, 52, Sturridge 20)
Arsenal 1 (Arteta pen 69) Att: 44,701

Norwich 0
Manchester City 0 Att: 26,832

Southampton 2 (Lambert 6, Davis 41)
Stoke 2 (Odemwingie 38, Crouch 44) Att: 27,987

Sunderland 0
Hull 2 (Long 16, Jelavic 62) Att: 42,810

Swansea 3 (Routledge 47, Dyer 79, Bony 85)
Cardiff 0 Att: 20,402

Sunday, February 9

Manchester United 2 (Van Persie 78, Carrick 80)
Fulham 2 (Sidwell 19, Bent 90+4) Att: 74,966

Tottenham 1 (Adebayor 65)
Everton 0 Att: 35,944

Tuesday, February 11

Cardiff 0
Aston Villa 0 Att: 27,597

Hull 0
Southampton 1 (Jose Fonte 69) Att: 23,670

West Bromwich 1 (Anichebe 87)
Chelsea 1 (Ivanovic 45+3) Att: 24,327

West Ham 2 (Collins 84, Diame 90+4)
Norwich 0 Att: 35,153

Wednesday, February 12

Arsenal 0
Manchester United 0 Att: 60,021

Fulham 2 (Toure og 8, Richardson 63)
Liverpool 3 (Sturridge 41, Coutinho 72, Gerrard pen 90+1) Att: 25,375

Newcastle 0
Tottenham 4 (Adebayor 19, 82, Paulinho 53, Chadli 88) Att: 48,264

Stoke 1 (Crouch 17)
Swansea 1 (Chico 52) Att: 24,822

Saturday, February 22

Arsenal 4 (Giroud 5, 31, Rosicky 42, Koscielny 57)
Sunderland 1 (Giaccherini 81) Att: 60,012

Cardiff 0
Hull 4 (Huddlestone 18, Jelavic 38, 57, Livermore 67) Att: 26,167

Chelsea 1 (Terry 90+3)
Everton 0 Att: 41,580

Crystal Palace 0
Manchester United 2 (Van Persie pen 62, Rooney 68) Att: 24,571

Manchester City 1 (Toure 70)
Stoke 0 Att: 47,038

West Bromwich 1 (Vydra 86)
Fulham 1 (Dejagah 28) Att: 25,782

West Ham 3 (Jarvis 20, C Cole 23, Nolan 71)
Southampton 1 (Yoshida 8) Att: 33,148

Sunday, February 23

Liverpool 4 (Sturridge 3, 36, Henderson 20, 74)
Swansea 3 (Shelvey 23, Bony 27, pen 47) Att: 44,731

Newcastle 1 (Remy 90+2)
Aston Villa 0 Att: 50,417

Norwich 1 (Snodgrass 47)
Tottenham 0 Att: 26,834

Saturday, March 1

Everton 1 (Lukaku 81)
West Ham 0 Att: 38,286

Fulham 1 (Heitinga 74)
Chelsea 3 (Schurrle 52, 65, 68) Att: 24,577

Hull 1 (Davies 46)
Newcastle 4 (Sissoko 10, 55, Remy 42, Anita 90+3) Att: 24,903

Southampton 0
Liverpool 3 (Suarez 16, Sterling 58, Gerrard pen 90+5) Att: 31,659

Stoke 1 (Walters pen 76)
Arsenal 0 Att: 26,711

Sunday, March 2

Aston Villa 4 (Benteke 25, 27, Bacuna 37, Bassong og 41)
Norwich 1 (Hoolahan 3) Att: 30,303

Swansea 1 (De Guzman 25)
Crystal Palace 1 (Murray pen 82) Att: 20,240

Tottenham 1 (Soldado 28)
Cardiff 0 Att: 35,512

ENGLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Chelsea	28	19	6	3	52	22	63
Liverpool	28	18	5	5	73	35	59
Arsenal	28	18	5	5	52	28	59
Man City	26	18	3	5	69	27	57
Tottenham	28	16	5	7	37	33	53
Everton	27	13	9	5	38	27	48
Man United	27	13	6	8	43	31	45
Newcastle	28	13	4	11	37	39	43
Southampton	28	10	9	9	38	35	39
West Ham	28	8	7	13	31	35	31
Aston Villa	28	8	7	13	31	38	31
Hull	28	8	6	14	30	35	30
Stoke	28	7	9	12	28	42	30
Swansea	28	7	8	13	37	41	29
Norwich	28	7	7	14	21	43	28
Crystal Palace	27	8	3	16	19	37	27
West Brom	27	4	13	10	31	39	25
Sunderland	26	6	6	14	26	42	24
Cardiff	28	5	7	16	19	49	22
Fulham	28	6	3	19	28	62	21

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

Leading goalscorers

24 Luis Suarez (Liverpool)
18 Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool)
15 Sergio Aguero (Manchester City)
13 Loic Remy (Newcastle)
13 Yaya Toure (Manchester City)

FA CUP

Last 16

Feb 15: Cardiff 1 Wigan 2; Manchester City 2 Chelsea 0; Sunderland 1 Southampton 0.
Feb 16: Arsenal 2 Liverpool 1; Everton 3 Swansea 1; Sheffield United 3 Nottingham Forest 1.
Feb 17: Brighton 1 Hull 1.
Feb 24: Sheffield Wednesday 1 Charlton 2.
Replay:
Feb 24: Hull 2 Brighton 1.

LEAGUE CUP

Final

Mar 2 - London (Wembley)
Manchester City 3 (Toure 55, Nasri 56, Jesus Navas 90)
Sunderland 1 (Borini 10)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 84,697. **Ref:** Atkinson

FRANCE

Friday, February 7

Toulouse 0
Saint-Etienne 0 Att: 12,123

Saturday, February 8

AC Ajaccio 3 (Faty 18, Andre 37, Cavalli 77)
Rennes 1 (Doucoure 34) Att: 5,981

Guingamp 1 (Alioui 62)
Reims 2 (Fortes 69, Ayite 72) Att: 12,953

Lille 2 (Origi 3, Mendes 90+3)
Sochaux 0 Att: 34,841

Marseille 3 (Payet 13, 25, Gignac 55)
Bastia 0 Att: 36,240

Montpellier 1 (Cabella 44)
Evian TG 1 (Berigaud 32) Att: 12,281

Valenciennes 2 (Doumbia 26, Waris 88)
Nice 1 (Maupay 75) Att: 12,186

Sunday, February 9

Monaco 1 (Thiago Silva og 74)
Paris Saint-Germain 1 (Pastore 8) Att: 16,384

Nantes 1 (Djordjevic 84)
Lyon 2 (Lacazette 40, Gomis pen 76) Att: 35,450

Tuesday, February 11

Toulouse 1 (Ben Basat 25)
Bastia 3 (Cisse 11, Modesto 45+2, Bruno pen 90+2) Att: 11,027

Friday, February 14

Paris Saint-Germain 3 (Lavezzi 18, Ibrahimovic 50, Kagelmacher og 52)
Valenciennes 0 Att: 45,727

Saturday, February 15

Bastia 0
Monaco 2 (Rodriguez 45, 77) Att: 13,816

Lorient 1 (Lautoa 41)
Toulouse 3 (Ben Yedder 60, Aurier 73, Braithwaite 80) Att: 14,875

Nice 0
Nantes 0 Att: 19,014

Reims 1 (De Preville 64)
Bordeaux 0 Att: 13,702

Rennes 2 (Toivonen 10, 65)
Montpellier 2 (Congre 54, Camara 90) Att: 14,353

Sochaux 1 (Sunzu 84)
Guingamp 0 Att: 12,349

Sunday, February 16

Evian TG 2 (Berigaud 15, Mongongu pen 64)
Lille 2 (Origi 23, Mendes 90+3) Att: 10,366

Lyon 3 (Fofana 43, Briand 69, Gomis 90)
AC Ajaccio 1 (Oliech 81) Att: 35,103

Saint-Etienne 1 (Brandao 90+2)
Marseille 1 (N'Koulou 64) Att: 32,024

Friday, February 21

Monaco 3 (Germain 8, Toulalan 63, Kurzawa 90+5)
Reims 2 (Oniangue 53, 71) Att: 6,127

Saturday, February 22

Bastia 0
Saint-Etienne 2 (Brandao 33, Harek og 90) Att: 13,515

Bordeaux 2 (Faubert 52, Saivet 82)
Evian TG 1 (Berigaud 73) Att: 12,465

Guingamp 1 (Yatabare 90+3)
Nice 0 Att: 11,897

Marseille 1 (Gignac 82)
Lorient 0 Att: 38,104

Montpellier 2 (Mounier 55, Cabella 90+4)
AC Ajaccio 0 Att: 12,028

Valenciennes 2 (Waris pen 51, 86)
Sochaux 2 (Corchia 54, Marange 88) Att: 13,340

Sunday, February 23

Lille 0
Lyon 0 Att: 43,518

Nantes 0
Rennes 3 (Ntep 16, Konradsen 63, Toivonen 90) Att: 34,169

Toulouse 2 (Ben Yedder 44, 72)
Paris Saint-Germain 4 (Ibrahimovic pen 32, 70, 89, Lavezzi 56) Att: 22,049

Tuesday, February 25

Bordeaux 3 (Saivet 22, Diabate 36, Hoarau 72)
Lorient 2 (Diallo 26, Kone 84) Att: 12,779

Friday, February 28

Evian TG 2 (Barbosa 61, Wass 77)
Nantes 0 Att: 8,991

Saturday, March 1

Lorient 1 (Ecuele Manga 35)
Bastia 1 (Bruno 50) Att: 15,152

Nice 0
Toulouse 2 (Ben Basat 66, Ben Yedder 90+2) Att: 20,729

Reims 3 (De Preville 21, Oniangue 38, Charbonnier 77)
Valenciennes 1 (Placide og 87) Att: 14,414

Rennes 0
Guingamp 2 (Giresse 39, Yatabare pen 90+5) Att: 28,831

Saint-Etienne 2 (Lemoine 17, Hamouma 67)
Monaco 0 Att: 34,034

Sochaux 2 (Ayew 70, Bakambu 82)
Bordeaux 0 Att: 13,095

One more needed...Jeffrey

NORTHERN IRELAND

Record for Blues boss

Linfield manager David Jeffrey, who has announced that he will step down in the summer, equalled the club record of winning 31 trophies as his side beat Crusaders on penalties in the Final of the County Antrim Shield.

Linfield goalkeeper Jonathan Tuffey saved two spot-kicks as they won the shoot-out after a goalless draw in Ballymena. Jeffrey will overtake former Blues boss Roy Coyle and claim a 32nd title if his side win this term's Premiership.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

St Pat's winning start

Defending league champions St Patrick's Athletic began the new season by beating cup holders Sligo Rovers 1-0 in the inaugural President's Cup. Keith Fahey scored the only goal of the game.

In trouble...CSKA supporters

RUSSIA

Stadium ban for CSKA

Out of European competition this season, CSKA Moscow have been ordered to play their next game in Europe

Sunday, March 2
AC Ajaccio 2 (Tallo 1, 42)
Lille 3 (Kalou pen 26, 38, pen 74) Att: 5,663

Lyon 0
Montpellier 0 Att: 35,865

Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Maxwell 50, Cavani 79)
Marseille 0 Att: 45,483

FRANCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PSG	27	19	7	1	64	18	64
Monaco	27	16	8	3	44	21	56
Lille	27	14	7	6	31	18	49
Saint-Etienne	27	14	6	7	38	23	48
Marseille	27	12	7	8	38	29	43
Lyon	27	11	9	7	40	31	42
Reims	27	11	9	7	35	33	42
Bordeaux	27	11	7	9	34	31	40
Bastia[1]	27	10	7	10	31	38	37
Toulouse	27	9	9	9	31	36	36
Montpellier	27	6	15	6	33	31	33
Lorient	27	9	6	12	35	38	33
Guingamp	27	8	8	11	26	28	32
Rennes	27	7	10	10	31	32	31
Nantes[1]	27	9	4	14	23	30	31
Nice	27	9	4	14	23	33	31
Evian TG	27	6	9	12	27	43	27
Valenciennes	27	5	7	15	27	45	22
Sochaux	27	5	7	15	22	48	22
AC Ajaccio	27	2	8	17	22	49	14

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated
[1]Result of the Nantes v Bastia game played on Aug 10, originally 2-0 to Nantes, was amended to 0-0 because Nantes fielded an ineligible player

Leading goalscorers
22 Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Paris Saint-Germain)
14 Edinson Cavani (Paris Saint-Germain)
13 Alexandre Lacazette (Lyon)
12 Vincent Aboubakar (Lorient)
12 Andre-Pierre Gignac (Marseille)

FRENCH CUP

Last 16
Feb 11: Angers 4 CA Bastia 2 (aet); Cannes 1 Montpellier 0 (aet); Lille 3 Caen 3 (aet, Lille 6-5 on pens).
Feb 12: Auxerre 0 Rennes 1; L'Ile-Rousse 0 Guingamp 2; Moulins 3 Sete 1; Nice 0 Monaco 1 (aet).
Feb 13: Lyon 1 Lens 2 (aet).

GERMANY

Friday, February 7
Monchengladbach 0
Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Son 62) Att: 53,379

Saturday, February 8
Eintracht Frankfurt 3 (Flum 7, Meier 43, Aigner 44)
Eintracht Braunschweig 0 Att: 40,500

Freiburg 1 (Schmid 68)
Hoffenheim 1 (Modeste 85) Att: 22,300

Hamburg 0
Hertha Berlin 3 (Allagui 15, Ramos 23, 38)
Att: 48,593

Nuremberg 0
Bayern Munich 2 (Mandzukic 18, Lahm 49)
Att: 50,000

Werder Bremen 1 (Aycicek 89)
Borussia Dortmund 5 (Lewandowski 26, 85, Mkhitaryan 41, 62, Friedrich 48) Att: 42,100

Wolfsburg 3 (Rodriguez pen 59, Dost 66, Luiz Gustavo 75)
Mainz 0 Att: 23,520

Sunday, February 9
Schalke 2 (Farfan 39, Meyer 44)
Hanover 0 Att: 61,307

Stuttgart 1 (Rausch 62)
Augsburg 4 (Milik 35, Hahn 43, 56, Werner 64)
Att: 40,200

Friday, February 14
Mainz 2 (Malli 51, Choupo-Moting 90+3)
Hanover 0 Att: 26,754

Saturday, February 15
Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Felipe Santana og 66)
Schalke 2 (Goretzka 28, Huntelaar 74) Att: 30,210

Bayern Munich 4 (Dante 19, Shaqiri 34, 42, Pizarro 88)
Freiburg 0 Att: 71,000

Borussia Dortmund 4 (Aubameyang 10, 21, Lewandowski pen 47, Jojic 68)
Eintracht Frankfurt 0 Att: 80,100

Eintracht Braunschweig 4 (Kumbela 51, 61, 85, Hochscheidt 90+3)
Hamburg 2 (Lasogga 23, Ilicevic 76) Att: 23,200

Hoffenheim 4 (Schipplock 12, 66, Volland 49, Roberto Firmino pen 90+2)
Stuttgart 1 (Rudiger 78) Att: 29,847

Werder Bremen 1 (Obraniak 88)
Monchengladbach 1 (Raffael 6) Att: 42,100

Sunday, February 16
Augsburg 0
Nuremberg 1 (Drmic 65) Att: 30,660

Hertha Berlin 1 (Skjelbred 21)
Wolfsburg 2 (Knoche 58, Caligiuri 78) Att: 40,648

Friday, February 21
Schalke 0
Mainz 0 Att: 60,952

Saturday, February 22
Freiburg 2 (Schmid 17, Mehmedi 73)
Augsburg 4 (Werner 7, Verhaegh 78, Altintop 84, Hahn 90+4) Att: 22,000

Hamburg 3 (Jiracek 42, Lasogga 58, Calhanoglu 90+1)
Borussia Dortmund 0 Att: 57,000

Monchengladbach 2 (Herrmann 4, Jantschke 18)
Hoffenheim 2 (Roberto Firmino 57, Salihovic pen 82) Att: 49,088

Nuremberg 2 (Kiyotake 46, Pekhart 47)
Eintracht Braunschweig 1 (Kumbela 34)
Att: 36,657

Stuttgart 1 (Boka 45)
Hertha Berlin 2 (Kobiashvili 5, Wagner 87)
Att: 45,700

Wolfsburg 3 (Dost 13, Luiz Gustavo 58, Rodriguez 73)
Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Sam 45) Att: 27,721

Sunday, February 23
Eintracht Frankfurt 0
Werder Bremen 0 Att: 44,300

Hanover 0
Bayern Munich 4 (Muller 25, 59, Thiago 34, Mandzukic 66) Att: 49,000

Friday, February 28
Hertha Berlin 0
Freiburg 0 Att: 37,920

Saturday, March 1
Augsburg 1 (Klavan 55)
Hanover 1 (Diouf 21) Att: 28,311

Bayer Leverkusen 0
Mainz 1 (Choupo-Moting 37) Att: 25,503

Bayern Munich 5 (Alaba 3, Robben 15, 28, pen 77, Mandzukic 24)
Schalke 1 (Rafinha og 64) Att: 71,000

Borussia Dortmund 3 (Hummels 51, Lewandowski 64, Mkhitaryan 83)
Nuremberg 0 Att: 80,645

Eintracht Braunschweig 1 (Ter Stegen og 52)
Monchengladbach 1 (Davari og 24) Att: 23,200

Werder Bremen 1 (Junuzovic 19)
Hamburg 0 Att: 42,100

Sunday, March 2
Eintracht Frankfurt 2 (Rosenthal 80, Meier 89)
Stuttgart 1 (Harnik 31) Att: 43,200

Hoffenheim 6 (Roberto Firmino 4, Sule 37, Modeste 39, 43, Salihovic pen 82, Schipplock 86)
Wolfsburg 2 (Dost 15, Perisic 76) Att: 24,519

GERMANY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bayern	23	21	2	0	66	10	65
Dortmund	23	14	3	6	54	27	45
Leverkusen	23	14	1	8	39	26	43
Schalke	23	12	5	6	42	35	41
Wolfsburg	23	12	3	8	40	32	39
Mainz	23	11	4	8	32	35	37
M'gladbach	23	10	6	7	40	29	36
Hertha	23	10	5	8	34	27	35
Augsburg	23	10	5	8	35	33	35
Hoffenheim	23	7	8	8	52	48	29
Hanover	23	7	4	12	30	42	25
Frankfurt	23	6	7	10	26	39	25
Werder	23	6	7	10	26	46	25
Nuremberg	23	4	11	8	27	40	23
Stuttgart	23	5	4	14	36	49	19
Hamburg	23	5	4	14	38	52	19
Freiburg	23	4	7	12	22	44	19
Braunschweig	23	4	4	15	17	42	16

34-round season (17x2); bottom 2 will be relegated, 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

Leading goalscorers
15 Robert Lewandowski (Borussia Dortmund)
14 Mario Mandzukic (Bayern Munich)
14 Adrian Ramos (Hertha Berlin)
13 Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang (B Dortmund)
12 Roberto Firmino (Hoffenheim)

GERMAN CUP

Quarter-finals
Feb 11: Eintracht Frankfurt 0 Borussia Dortmund 1.
Feb 12: Bayer Leverkusen 0 Kaiserslautern 1 (aet); Hamburg 0 Bayern Munich 5; Hoffenheim 2 Wolfsburg 3.

GREECE

Feb 6: Panetolikos 0 Aris 0.
Feb 8: Platanias 0 Ergotelis 1; Apollon 2 Xanthi 0; Veria 0 Olympiakos 5.
Feb 9: Atromitos 3 Asteras 1; Giannina 1 Panetolikos 0; Kalloni 1 Levadiakos 0; Panathinaikos 2 PAOK 1.
Feb 10: OFI 1 Panthrakikos 0; Aris 1 Panionios 0.
Feb 15: Xanthi 1 Kalloni 0; Levadiakos 1 Atromitos 0; Olympiakos 4 Platanias 2.
Feb 16: Asteras 2 PAOK 1; Aris 0 Veria 0; Panionios 2 Giannina 0; Panetolikos 2 Apollon 1; Panthrakikos 0 Panathinaikos 2.
Feb 17: Ergotelis 0 OFI 1.
Feb 22: Levadiakos 3 Asteras 1; Apollon 1 Panionios 2; OFI 0 Olympiakos 4.
Feb 23: Panathinaikos 1 Ergotelis 1; Atromitos 2 Xanthi 0; Platanias 2 Aris 1; Giannina 0 Veria 1; PAOK 3 Panthrakikos 0.
Feb 24: Kalloni 3 Panetolikos 1.
Mar 1: Xanthi 4 Levadiakos 1; Veria 1 Apollon 1; Aris 0 OFI 0.
Mar 2: Panetolikos 1 Atromitos 3; Asteras 1 Panthrakikos 0; Ergotelis 2 PAOK 2; Panionios 1 Kalloni 1; Olympiakos 0 Panathinaikos 3.
Mar 3: Platanias 1 Giannina 2.

GREECE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olympiakos	27	24	2	1	78	12	74
Atromitos	27	16	7	4	43	19	55
PAOK	27	17	4	6	54	27	55
Panathinaikos	27	15	5	7	42	22	50
Asteras	27	13	9	5	38	25	48
Giannina	27	11	2	14	29	37	35
OFI	27	8	10	9	21	32	34
Panthrakikos	27	9	7	11	31	39	34
Panetolikos	27	9	7	11	28	28	34
Kalloni	27	10	3	14	27	44	33
Xanthi	27	9	5	13	33	42	32
Ergotelis	27	7	11	9	28	31	32
Panionios	27	8	7	12	24	31	31
Levadiakos	27	9	3	15	30	48	30
Apollon	27	6	8	13	32	42	26
Platanias	27	6	7	14	25	40	25
Veria	27	5	9	13	21	45	24
Aris	27	3	10	14	21	41	19

34-round season (17x2); bottom 2 will be relegated, 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

HOLLAND

Feb 6: Utrecht 1 Zwolle 2; Ajax 2 Groningen 1.
Feb 7: Vitesse 0 Den Haag 0.
Feb 8: PSV 3 Twente 2; Go Ahead Eagles 2 AZ 1; NAC 2 Roda JC 0; Feyenoord 5 NEC 1.
Feb 9: Heracles 1 Cambuur 1; RKC 5 Utrecht 2; Zwolle 1 Ajax 1; Groningen 1 Heerenveen 3.
Feb 12: Groningen 1 Twente 1.
Feb 14: PSV 2 Heracles 1.
Feb 15: Twente 2 Vitesse 0; Roda JC 0 Den Haag 1; RKC 1 NEC 3; AZ 1 Utrecht 1.
Feb 16: Cambuur 3 Zwolle 1; Groningen 1 Go Ahead Eagles 0; NAC 1 Feyenoord 1; Ajax 3 Heerenveen 0.
Feb 21: Den Haag 3 Go Ahead Eagles 2.
Feb 22: Heerenveen 0 NAC 0; Cambuur 1 Roda JC 0; Zwolle 1 Heracles 1; NEC 0 PSV 2.
Feb 23: Utrecht 1 Groningen 0; Ajax 4 AZ 0; Vitesse 3 RKC 1; Twente 2 Feyenoord 2.
Feb 28: Heracles 1 Heerenveen 2.
Mar 1: Zwolle 3 NEC 3; Den Haag 1 NAC 1; Go Ahead Eagles 2 PSV 3; Vitesse 3 Roda JC 0.
Mar 2: Utrecht 1 Twente 1; Feyenoord 1 Ajax 2; Groningen 1 Cambuur 1; AZ 4 RKC 0.

behind closed doors after their supporters displayed "racist and far-right symbols" during their Champions League game away to Viktoria Plzen in December.

SCOTLAND

Forster's unlucky 13

Celtic goalkeeper Fraser Forster set a new Scottish record with 13 consecutive clean sheets in the league. He was finally beaten, after 1,256 minutes, in a 2-1 defeat at Aberdeen – a result which also ended his side's 26-match unbeaten league run.

Should they win the title, Celtic will play next term's Champions League qualifying matches at Murrayfield. The club are having to move matches from Celtic Park as it is being used for the Commonwealth Games.

In form...Celtic's Forster

SLOVAKIA

Vittek voted the best

Slovan Bratislava forward Robert Vittek was named the Slovak First League's player of last year in a poll organised by the daily newspaper *Pravda* in co-operation with the Slovak Football Association.

Best in the league...Vittek

HOLLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ajax	26	17	6	3	56	21	57
Twente	26	13	10	3	57	27	49
Vitesse	26	14	7	5	52	32	49
Feyenoord	26	13	6	7	55	37	45
PSV	26	13	5	8	48	34	44
Heerenveen	26	11	7	8	53	44	40
AZ	26	11	4	11	42	41	37
Zwolle	26	8	10	8	39	37	34
Groningen	26	8	9	9	42	43	33
NAC	26	8	8	10	37	41	32
Cambuur	26	8	6	12	29	35	30
Heracles	26	8	6	12	36	43	30
Utrecht	26	8	6	12	35	50	30
Go Ahead	26	7	7	12	38	55	28
Den Haag	26	8	4	14	30	54	28
RKC	26	6	8	12	38	51	26
NEC	26	5	10	11	42	64	25
Roda JC	26	5	7	14	35	55	22

34-round season (17x2); bottom team will be relegated, 2nd & 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs

ITALY

Saturday, February 8

Fiorentina 2 (Ilicic 16, Wolski 86)
Atalanta 0 Att: 28,319

Napoli 3 (Inler 11, Higuain 56, 82)
Milan 1 (Taarabt 8) Att: 38,593

Udinese 3 (Di Natale 56, Bruno Fernandes 74, Badu 86)
Chievo 0 Att: 11,000

Sunday, February 9

Internazionale 1 (Samuel 48)
Sassuolo 0 Att: 34,528

Lazio 0
Roma 0 Att: 49,236

Livorno 0
Genoa 1 (Antonelli 10) Att: 9,470

Parma 0
Catania 0 Att: 10,609

Sampdoria 1 (Gastaldello 11)
Cagliari 0 Att: 20,439

Torino 1 (Immobile 5)
Bologna 2 (Cristaldo 11, 24) Att: 16,411

Verona 2 (Toni 52, Gomez 90+4)
Juventus 2 (Tevez 4, 21) Att: 25,140

Friday, February 14

Milan 1 (Balotelli 86)
Bologna 0 Att: 29,631

Saturday, February 15

Fiorentina 1 (Cuadrado 46)
Internazionale 2 (Palacio 34, Icardi 65) Att: 35,584

Sunday, February 16

Atalanta 0
Parma 4 (Molinaro 9, Benalouane og 74, Cassano 77, Schelotto 90+3) Att: 11,233

Cagliari 1 (Nene 64)
Livorno 2 (Emerson 44, Paulinho pen 53) Att: 4,798

Catania 3 (Izco 1, Spolli 48, Peruzzi 58)
Lazio 1 (Mauri 45+1) Att: 12,487

Genoa 3 (Konate 45, Gilardino 69, 79)
Udinese 3 (Basta 35, Bruno Fernandes 40, Muriel pen 48) Att: 18,061

Juventus 3 (Asamoah 17, Marchisio 29, Llorente 58)
Chievo 1 (Caceres og 51) Att: 38,812

Roma 3 (Destro 44, 57, Pjanic 54)
Sampdoria 0 Att: 29,530

Sassuolo 0
Napoli 2 (Dzemaili 37, Insigne 56) Att: 17,713

Monday, February 17

Verona 1 (Toni pen 36)
Torino 3 (Immobile 49, Cerci 53, El Kaddouri 61) Att: 20,964

Saturday, February 22

Bologna 0
Roma 1 (Nainggolan 37) Att: 22,755

Sunday, February 23

Chievo 2 (Thereau pen 37, Rigoni 68)
Catania 0 Att: 5,000

Internazionale 1 (Rolando 51)
Cagliari 1 (Pinilla pen 40) Att: 37,893

Juventus 1 (Tevez 30)
Torino 0 Att: 38,717

Lazio 3 (Radu 37, Klose 74, Cannavaro og 83)
Sassuolo 2 (Floccari 72, Floro Flores 79) Att: 35,000

Livorno 2 (Paulinho 72, Greco 73)
Verona 3 (Jankovic 33, Romulo 43, Toni 45+1) Att: 10,030

Sampdoria 0
Milan 2 (Taarabt 12, Rami 58) Att: 23,222

Udinese 1 (Di Natale pen 71)
Atalanta 1 (Brivio 24) Att: 12,445

Monday, February 24

Napoli 1 (Higuain 18)
Genoa 1 (Calaio 84) Att: 30,377

Parma 2 (Cassano 39, Amauri pen 51)
Fiorentina 2 (Cuadrado 41, Fernandez 85) Att: 13,766

Saturday, March 1

Roma 0
Internazionale 0 Att: 37,464

Sunday, March 2

Atalanta 2 (Carmona 21, Cigarini 85)
Chievo 1 (Dainelli 72) Att: 12,091

Cagliari 3 (Ibarbo 18, Vecino 81, Ibraimi 89)
Udinese 0 Att: 5,000

Fiorentina 0
Lazio 1 (Cana 5) Att: 28,488

Genoa 2 (Antonelli 14, Sturaro 85)
Catania 0 Att: 18,092

Livorno 1 (Reina og 39)
Napoli 1 (Mertens pen 32) Att: 11,803

Milan 0
Juventus 2 (Llorente 44, Tevez 68) Att: 52,099

Sassuolo 0
Parma 1 (Parolo 2) Att: 11,693

Torino 0
Sampdoria 2 (Okaka Chuka 7, Gabbiadini 79) Att: 13,975

Verona 0
Bologna 0 Att: 20,476

ITALY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Juventus	26	22	3	1	62	19	69
Roma	25	17	7	1	49	11	58
Napoli	26	15	7	4	51	29	52
Fiorentina	26	13	6	7	45	29	45
Inter	26	10	11	5	43	29	41
Parma	25	10	10	5	39	29	40
Verona	26	12	4	10	43	42	40
Lazio	26	10	8	8	34	34	38
Torino	26	9	9	8	39	34	36
Milan	26	9	8	9	39	37	35
Genoa	26	9	8	9	30	32	35
Sampdoria	26	8	7	11	29	37	31
Atalanta	26	9	4	13	27	38	31
Cagliari	26	6	10	10	26	35	28
Udinese	26	8	4	14	29	39	28
Bologna	26	4	10	12	22	41	22
Chievo	26	5	6	15	20	37	21
Livorno	26	5	6	15	27	46	21
Catania	26	4	7	15	19	45	19
Sassuolo	26	4	5	17	25	55	17

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

Leading goalscorers

15 Carlos Tevez (Juventus)
14 Giuseppe Rossi (Fiorentina)
13 Gonzalo Higuain (Napoli)
13 Ciro Immobile (Torino)
13 Luca Toni (Verona)

ITALIAN CUP

Semi-finals

1st legs - Feb 4/5; 2nd legs - Feb 11/12
Roma v Napoli 3-2, 0-3 (agg 3-5)
Udinese v Fiorentina 2-1, 0-2 (agg 2-3)

POLAND

Regular season

Feb 14: Podbeskidzie 1 Widzew 0; Legia 1 Korona 0.
Feb 15: Cracovia 0 Zawisza 2; Lechia 2 Pogon 3.
Feb 16: Ruch 1 Jagiellonia 0; Zaglebie 3 Gornik 0; Lech 2 Slask 1.
Feb 17: Piast 0 Wisla 1.
Feb 21: Jagiellonia 2 Podbeskidzie 2; Pogon 5 Lech 1.
Feb 22: Widzew 1 Piast 1; Gornik 0 Legia 3.
Feb 23: Korona 1 Zaglebie 1; Wisla 3 Cracovia 1; Slask 2 Ruch 3.
Feb 24: Zawisza 0 Lechia 3.
Feb 28: Ruch 2 Widzew 1; Lechia 0 Wisla 0.
Mar 1: Gornik 0 Korona 0; Lech 4 Piast 0.
Mar 2: Cracovia 0 Slask 1; Zaglebie 3 Zawisza 1; Legia 0 Jagiellonia 3 (awarded).
Mar 3: Podbeskidzie 0 Pogon 0.

RANKINGS ON MARCH 3 (morning)

POS		TEAM	GOALS	FACTOR	PTS
1	Luis Suarez	Liverpool (Eng)	24	2	48
2	Cristiano Ronaldo	Real Madrid (Spa)	23	2	46
3	Diego Costa	Atletico Madrid (Spa)	21	2	42
4	Daniel Sturridge	Liverpool (Eng)	18	2	36
5	Alfred Finnbogason	Heerenveen (Hol)	22	1.5	33
	Zlatan Ibrahimovic	Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)	22	1.5	33
7	Alexis Sanchez	Barcelona (Spa)	16	2	32
8	Alan	Salzburg (Aut)	21	1.5	31.5
	Jonatan Soriano	Salzburg (Aut)	21	1.5	31.5
10	Sergio Aguero	Manchester City (Eng)	15	2	30
	Karim Benzema	Real Madrid (Spa)	15	2	30
	Antoine Griezmann	Real Sociedad (Spa)	15	2	30
	Robert Lewandowski	Borussia Dortmund (Ger)	15	2	30
	Lionel Messi	Barcelona (Spa)	15	2	30
	Graziano Pelle	Feyenoord (Hol)	20	1.5	30
	Carlos Tevez	Juventus (Ita)	15	2	30

SPAIN

More Messi milestones

Lionel Messi's two goals in Barcelona's 6-0 victory over Rayo Vallecano took him to 338 – a Spanish record for one club. His goal in the 3-1 defeat at Real Sociedad put him third, on 229, in the all-time La Liga goalscorers list, and his opener in Barca's 2-0 win at Manchester City equalled Raul's Champions League record for goals for a single club: 66 with Real Madrid.

Barcelona and Real Madrid will meet in the Spanish Cup Final on April 16 at Valencia's Mestalla stadium.

The road leading to Atletico Madrid's new stadium will be named after former Spain boss Luis Aragones, who coached the club five times before he passed away in February. Atletico are expected to move away from their Vicente Calderon home by the start of the 2016-17 season.

History maker...Messi gets on the scoresheet against Rayo Vallecano

UKRAINE

Brazilian striker killed

Shakhtar Donetsk's 25-year-old Brazilian striker Maicon was killed in a car

POLAND – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Legia	24	16	1	7	48	25	49
Wisla	24	12	8	4	34	20	44
Ruch	24	11	8	5	33	32	41
Lech	24	11	7	6	41	28	40
Gornik	24	11	6	7	36	33	39
Pogon	24	9	10	5	38	32	37
Jagiellonia	24	9	6	9	39	31	33
Zawisza	24	8	8	8	37	29	32
Lechia	24	7	10	7	30	31	31
Cracovia	24	9	3	12	32	40	30
Korona	24	7	7	10	30	35	28
Piast	24	7	7	10	22	39	28
Slask	24	6	9	9	30	32	27
Zaglebie	24	6	6	12	24	31	24
Podbeskidzie	24	4	10	10	20	33	22
Widzew	24	4	4	16	21	44	16

30-round regular season (15x2); top 8 will form championship group, bottom 8 will form relegation group (from which the bottom 2 will go down)

PORTUGAL

Feb 8: Nacional 2 Belenenses 0; Setubal 3 Guimaraes 2.
Feb 9: Olhanense 1 Maritimo 1; Rio Ave 1 Arouca 1; Porto 3 Pacos de Ferreira 0; Braga 4 Gil Vicente 1.
Feb 10: Academica 0 Estoril 1.
Feb 11: Benfica 2 Sporting 0.
Feb 15: Belenenses 0 Academica 0; Sporting 1 Olhanense 0.
Feb 16: Guimaraes 1 Rio Ave 0; Arouca 1 Nacional 1; Maritimo 1 Setubal 0; Pacos de Ferreira 0 Benfica 2; Gil Vicente 1 Porto 2.
Feb 17: Estoril 2 Braga 1.
Feb 21: Academica 0 Nacional 0.
Feb 22: Braga 2 Arouca 2; Rio Ave 1 Sporting 2.
Feb 23: Olhanense 2 Gil Vicente 1; Setubal 4 Pacos de Ferreira 0; Maritimo 2 Belenenses 0; Porto 0 Estoril 1.
Feb 24: Benfica 1 Guimaraes 0.
Mar 1: Estoril 4 Olhanense 0; Sporting 2 Braga 1.
Mar 2: Gil Vicente 1 Setubal 0; Pacos de Ferreira 3 Maritimo 1; Nacional 1 Rio Ave 1; Belenenses 0 Benfica 1; Guimaraes 2 Porto 2.
Mar 3: Arouca 0 Academica 3.

PORTUGAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Benfica	21	16	4	1	38	13	52
Sporting	21	14	5	2	40	14	47
Porto	21	13	4	4	39	16	43
Estoril	21	11	6	4	34	20	39
Nacional	21	8	10	3	29	20	34
Guimaraes	21	9	3	9	23	21	30
Braga	21	8	3	10	30	27	27
Maritimo	21	7	6	8	30	34	27
Academica	21	7	6	8	15	21	27
Setubal	21	7	4	10	26	32	25
Rio Ave	21	6	5	10	16	23	23
Gil Vicente	21	6	4	11	18	30	22
Arouca	21	4	7	10	19	29	19
Belenenses	21	3	7	11	11	25	16
Olhanense	21	4	4	13	14	35	16
Pacos Ferreira	21	4	4	13	19	41	16

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

ROMANIA

Feb 14: Steaua 4 Concordia 0.
Feb 18: Steaua 2 Universitatea 0.
Feb 21: Sageata 1 Botosani 0; Astra 3 Corona 0.
Feb 22: Otelul 1 Pandurii 0.
Feb 23: Dinamo 1 Viitorul 2; CFR 0 Vaslui 0; Brasov 1 Petrolul 1.
Feb 24: Ceahlaul 1 Universitatea 1; Concordia 1 Steaua 4; Gaz Metan 0 Poli 1.
Feb 28: Viitorul 1 CFR 1; Universitatea 1 Astra 0.
Mar 1: Poli 1 Sageata 1; Steaua 1 Dinamo 1.
Mar 2: Botosani 2 Brasov 1; Petrolul 2 Otelul 0; Pandurii 1 Ceahlaul 1.
Mar 3: Corona 2 Concordia 2; Vaslui 1 Gaz Metan 0.

ROMANIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Steaua	21	14	7	0	47	14	49
Astra	21	14	3	4	48	20	45
Petrolul	21	12	8	1	32	12	44
Pandurii	21	10	5	6	42	25	35
Dinamo	21	9	6	6	30	19	33
Vaslui	21	9	6	6	22	15	33
CFR	21	7	9	5	27	22	30
Ceahlaul	21	7	8	6	21	20	29
Gaz Metan	21	7	6	8	23	23	27
Concordia	21	7	5	9	25	30	26
Poli	21	7	5	9	19	25	26
Botosani	21	6	5	10	19	33	23
Sageata	21	6	5	10	20	39	23
Viitorul	21	5	7	9	16	33	22
Otelul	21	6	3	12	22	37	21
Universitatea	21	5	5	11	18	35	20
Brasov	21	3	8	10	20	29	17
Corona	21	2	5	14	16	36	11

34-round season (17x2); bottom 4 will be relegated

SCOTLAND

Regular season

Feb 15: St Mirren 0 Aberdeen 1; Motherwell 4 Partick 3; Inverness 0 Hearts 0; Hibernian 2 Ross County 1; Dundee United 3 Kilmarnock 2.
Feb 16: Celtic 3 St Johnstone 0.
Feb 21: Dundee United 3 Motherwell 1.
Feb 22: Hearts 0 Celtic 2; Kilmarnock 1 Hibernian 1; Partick 3 Aberdeen 1; Ross County 2 St Mirren 1; St Johnstone 0 Inverness 1.
Feb 25: Ross County 0 Inverness 3; Aberdeen 2 Celtic 1; St Johnstone 3 Motherwell 0.
Feb 28: Hibernian 1 Dundee United 3.
Mar 1: Aberdeen 1 St Johnstone 0; Celtic 5 Inverness 0; Motherwell 4 Hearts 1; Ross County 1 Partick 1; St Mirren 2 Kilmarnock 0.

SCOTLAND – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Celtic	28	24	3	1	68	14	75
Aberdeen	28	17	3	8	40	26	54
Motherwell	27	16	2	9	43	40	50
Dundee Utd	27	12	8	7	49	32	44
Inverness	26	13	5	8	33	26	44
St Johnstone	27	10	5	12	34	31	35
Hibernian	27	8	8	11	25	32	32
Kilmarnock	28	7	6	15	33	47	27
St Mirren	28	7	6	15	27	44	27
Partick	28	5	11	12	29	45	26
Ross County	28	7	5	16	33	50	26
Hearts[1]	28	5	6	17	23	50	6

33-round regular season (11x3); top 6 will form championship group, bottom 6 will form relegation group (from which the bottom team will go down and the 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs)

[1] 15pts deducted for going into administration

Leading goalscorers

18 Kris Commons (Celtic)
16 Kris Boyd (Kilmarnock)
16 Stevie May (St Johnstone)
16 Billy McKay (Inverness)
14 John Sutton (Motherwell)

SPAIN

Friday, February 7
Espanyol 1 (Moreno 79)
Granada 0 Att: 14,011

Saturday, February 8
Almeria 2 (Verza 80, pen 86)
Atletico Madrid 0 Att: 10,958

Rayo Vallecano 4 (Iago Falque 26, 63, Arbilla 28, Larrivey pen 45)
Malaga 1 (Yakovenko 72) Att: 9,430

Real Madrid 4 (Bale 7, Benzema 25, 76, Jese 64)
Villarreal 2 (Mario 43, Dos Santos 69) Att: 75,624

Valencia 5 (Mathieu 41, Alcacer 44, 68, Feghouli 62, Vargas 79)
Betis 0 Att: 40,000

Sunday, February 9
Osasuna 2 (Oriol Riera 6, Roberto Torres 88)
Getafe 0 Att: 14,184

Real Sociedad 0
Levante 0 Att: 23,788

Sevilla 1 (Alberto Moreno 15)
Barcelona 4 (Sanchez 34, Messi 44, 56, Fabregas 88) Att: 25,000

Valladolid 2 (Osorio 71, 78)
Elche 2 (Coro 34, Manu 66) Att: 12,750

Monday, February 10
Celta Vigo 0
Athletic Bilbao 0 Att: 17,880

Friday, February 14
Elche 0
Osasuna 0 Att: 22,000

Saturday, February 15
Atletico Madrid 3 (Raul Garcia 3, Diego Costa 5, Godin 74)
Valladolid 0 Att: 35,000

Barcelona 6 (Adriano 2, Messi 36, 68, Sanchez 53, Pedro 56, Neymar 89)
Rayo Vallecano 0 Att: 74,517

Levante 1 (Barral 62)
Almeria 0 Att: 15,538

Villarreal 0
Celta Vigo 2 (Orellana 83, Nolito 90) Att: 14,195

Sunday, February 16
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Gurpegi 56)
Espanyol 2 (Sergio Garcia 6, Colotto 65) Att: 36,000

Getafe 0
Real Madrid 3 (Jese 5, Benzema 27, Modric 66) Att: 13,000

Granada 1 (Piti 31)
Betis 0 Att: 17,747

Sevilla 0
Valencia 0 Att: 30,000

Monday, February 17
Malaga 0
Real Sociedad 1 (Vela 10) Att: 18,000

Friday, February 21
Valladolid 1 (Javi Guerra 52)
Levante 1 (Victor 25) Att: 14,885

Saturday, February 22
Almeria 0
Malaga 0 Att: 9,874

Celta Vigo 1 (Rafinha 59)
Getafe 1 (Lafita 20) Att: 20,565

Real Madrid 3 (Illarramendi 34, Bale 71, Isco 81)
Elche 0 Att: 68,500

Real Sociedad 3 (Song og 32, Griezmann 54, Zurutuza 59)
Barcelona 1 (Messi 36) Att: 30,485

Sunday, February 23
Betis 0
Athletic Bilbao 2 (Muniain pen 34, Guillermo 81) Att: 28,061

Osasuna 3 (Cejudo 6, Armenteros 21, Roberto Torres 42)
Atletico Madrid 0 Att: 15,361

Rayo Vallecano 0
Sevilla 1 (Coke 57) Att: 13,800

Valencia 2 (Alcacer 64, Vezo 90)
Granada 1 (Piti 47) Att: 40,000

Monday, February 24
Espanyol 1 (Cordoba 77)
Villarreal 2 (Moi Gomez 36, Perbet 50) Att: 12,650

Friday, February 28
Athletic Bilbao 4 (Aduriz 6, 18, pen 74, Gurpegi 80)
Granada 0 Att: 33,000

Saturday, March 1
Elche 1 (Carles Gil 84)
Celta Vigo 0 Att: 20,050

Getafe 0
Espanyol 0 Att: 9,000

Levante 2 (Diop 4, Ruben Garcia 42)
Osasuna 0 Att: 11,323

Malaga 1 (Santa Cruz 13)
Valladolid 1 (Larsson 30) Att: 28,000

Sunday, March 2
Atletico Madrid 2 (Koke 28, Gabi 45+1)
Real Madrid 2 (Benzema 3, Cristiano Ronaldo 82) Att: 54,600

Barcelona 4 (Sanchez 9, Messi 24, Puyol 83, Xavi 89)
Almeria 1 (Trujillo 27) Att: 58,930

Rayo Vallecano 1 (Larrivey 61)
Valencia 0 Att: 9,720

Sevilla 1 (Gameiro 77)
Real Sociedad 0 Att: 29,618

Villarreal 1 (Bruno Soriano pen 71)
Betis 1 (Ruben Castro 85) Att: 18,693

crash in the city.

Maicon Pereira de Oliveira played for Fluminense and Flamengo in his homeland as a youth before joining Volyn Lutsk of Ukraine in 2009. After a loan spell with Romanian side Steaua Bucharest, he joined Shakhtar in 2012. At the time of his death he was on a season-long loan at Illichivets Mariupol.

The restart of the Ukrainian domestic campaign following the mid-season winter break was delayed due to the unstable political situation in the country.

Venue...Cardiff City Stadium

WALES

UEFA Super Cup hosts

Cardiff City Stadium will play host to this year's UEFA Super Cup, between the winners of the Champions League and the Europa League, on August 12.

Tribute...the late Benitez

ECUADOR

Benitez honoured

A new 8,000-capacity stadium in Guayaquil has been named the Estadio Christian Benitez Betancourt in honour of Ecuador's international striker who died last year.

SPAIN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Madrid	26	20	4	2	73	26	64
Barcelona	26	20	3	3	74	21	63
Atletico	26	19	4	3	61	21	61
Athletic	26	15	5	6	49	30	50
Villarreal	26	13	5	8	47	31	44
Sociedad	26	12	7	7	46	36	43
Sevilla	26	10	8	8	44	41	38
Levante	26	9	9	8	26	31	36
Valencia	26	10	5	11	38	37	35
Espanyol	26	9	6	11	29	32	33
Celta	26	8	6	12	32	37	30
Elche	26	7	8	11	23	37	29
Osasuna	26	8	5	13	24	39	29
Granada	26	8	3	15	22	36	27
Getafe	26	7	6	13	23	40	27
Malaga	26	6	8	12	24	35	26
Almeria	26	7	5	14	25	46	26
Valladolid	26	4	11	11	28	44	23
Rayo	26	7	2	17	26	59	23
Betis	26	3	6	17	21	56	15

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

Leading goalscorers

23 Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid)
21 Diego Costa (Atletico Madrid)
16 Alexis Sanchez (Barcelona)
15 Karim Benzema (Real Madrid)
15 Antoine Griezmann (Real Sociedad)
15 Lionel Messi (Barcelona)

SPANISH CUP

Semi-finals

1st legs - Feb 5; 2nd legs - Feb 11/12

Barcelona v Real Sociedad 2-0, 1-1 (agg 3-1)
Real Madrid v Atletico Madrid 3-0, 2-0 (agg 5-0)

SWITZERLAND

Feb 8: Thun 2 Lucerne 1; Basle 3 Young Boys 2.
Feb 9: Sion 1 Lausanne 2; Grasshopper 1 Aarau 2; St Gallen 0 Zurich 2.
Feb 15: Basle 1 Sion 0; Lucerne 3 Aarau 2.
Feb 16: St Gallen 1 Grasshopper 5; Zurich 3 Thun 1; Young Boys 5 Lausanne 3.
Feb 22: Thun 3 Sion 1; Aarau 1 Zurich 2.
Feb 23: Lucerne 1 Young Boys 2; Lausanne 3 St Gallen 0; Grasshopper 1 Basle 1.
Feb 26: Sion 3 Young Boys 0.
Mar 1: Zurich 3 Grasshopper 1; Lausanne 0 Aarau 1.
Mar 2: Thun 2 Basle 2; St Gallen 1 Lucerne 1.

SWITZERLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Basle	23	11	11	1	42	23	44
Young Boys	23	12	4	7	41	29	40
Grasshopper	23	10	7	6	37	25	37
Zurich	23	11	4	8	36	31	37
Lucerne	23	10	6	7	31	32	36
Thun	23	8	7	8	34	34	31
St Gallen	23	8	7	8	25	29	31
Aarau	22	7	4	11	34	42	25
Sion	22	5	5	12	20	29	20
Lausanne	23	4	1	18	23	49	13

36-round season (9x4); bottom team will be relegated

TURKEY

Feb 7: Kasimpasa 1 Konyaspor 3; Gaziantepspor 1 Besiktas 2.
Feb 8: Kayseri Erciyesspor 1 Rizespor 1; Galatasaray 3 Eskisehirspor 0.
Feb 9: Elazigspor 3 Kayserispor 0; Sivasspor 2 Fenerbahce 0; Bursaspor 1 Antalyaspor 1; Trabzonspor 2 Akhisar 4.
Feb 10: Genclerbirligi 1 Karabukspor 2.
Feb 11: Kasimpasa 0 Besiktas 3.
Feb 14: Rizespor 5 Gaziantepspor 1.
Feb 15: Kayserispor 1 Genclerbirligi 0; Karabukspor 2 Trabzonspor 2.
Feb 16: Besiktas 1 Bursaspor 0; Akhisar 0 Kayseri Erciyesspor 2; Fenerbahce 2 Kasimpasa 1.
Feb 17: Konyaspor 2 Elazigspor 3; Eskisehirspor 2 Sivasspor 2; Antalyaspor 2 Galatasaray 2.
Feb 21: Bursaspor 2 Rizespor 0.
Feb 22: Gaziantepspor 1 Akhisar 1; Kayseri Erciyesspor 2 Karabukspor 1; Galatasaray 1 Besiktas 0.
Feb 23: Genclerbirligi 2 Konyaspor 2; Kasimpasa 6 Sivasspor 2; Antalyaspor 0 Eskisehirspor 0; Trabzonspor 2 Kayserispor 1.
Feb 24: Elazigspor 1 Fenerbahce 1.
Feb 28: Akhisar 2 Bursaspor 1; Besiktas 0 Antalyaspor 0.
Mar 1: Karabukspor 0 Gaziantepspor 1; Eskisehirspor 0 Kasimpasa 0; Fenerbahce 2 Genclerbirligi 0.
Mar 2: Kayserispor 0 Kayseri Erciyesspor 4; Sivasspor 1 Elazigspor 3; Konyaspor 0 Trabzonspor 0; Rizespor 1 Galatasaray 1.

TURKEY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fenerbahce	23	16	3	4	51	26	51
Galatasaray	23	12	9	2	41	20	45
Besiktas	23	12	7	4	39	22	43
Sivasspor	23	11	3	9	41	37	36
Akhisar	23	10	5	8	32	30	35
Kasimpasa	23	9	7	7	38	30	34
Trabzonspor	23	9	7	7	32	29	34
Karabukspor	23	9	7	7	25	24	34
Eskisehirspor	23	9	6	8	27	24	33
Bursaspor	23	8	7	8	26	30	31
Gaziantepspor	23	8	5	10	27	39	29
Konyaspor	23	8	4	11	33	34	28
Elazigspor	23	8	2	13	32	47	26
Antalyaspor	23	5	10	8	26	28	25
Genclerbirligi	23	7	4	12	25	31	25
Rizespor	23	5	7	11	26	33	22
K Erciyesspor	23	6	4	13	24	36	22
Kayserispor	23	3	7	13	15	40	16

34-round season (17x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

UKRAINE

UKRAINE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shakhtar	17	12	2	3	38	14	38
Metalist	16	9	6	1	30	14	33
Dynamo	17	10	3	4	34	19	33
Dnipro	16	9	5	2	30	18	32
Chornomorets	17	9	5	3	18	11	32
Vorskla	17	6	7	4	25	26	25
Zorya	17	6	6	5	20	16	24
Metalurh D	17	6	5	6	26	30	23
Volyn	17	5	5	7	17	26	20
Karpaty	16	4	7	5	18	22	19
Sevastopol	17	5	4	8	19	30	19
Illichivets	17	5	2	10	14	20	17
Hoverla	17	4	2	11	14	26	14
Metalurh Z	17	1	5	11	16	29	8
Tavriya	17	2	2	13	12	30	8
Arsenal[1] (R)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

28-round season (14x2); bottom 2 will be relegated
[1]*Arsenal expelled from league after going bankrupt; results annulled*

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Preliminary round

1st legs - Jan 28-30; 2nd legs - Feb 4-6

Caracas (Ven) v Lanus (Arg) 0-2, 0-1 (agg 0-3)
Deportivo Quito (Ecu) v Botafogo (Bra)
1-0, 0-4 (agg 1-4)
Morelia (Mex) v Independiente Santa Fe (Col)
2-1, 0-1 (agg 2-2, Santa Fe on away goals)
Oriente Petrolero (Bol) v Nacional (Uru)
1-0, 0-2 (agg 1-2)
Sporting Cristal (Per) v Atletico Paranaense (Bra)
2-1, 1-2 (agg 3-3, Paranaense 5-4 on pens)
Universidad de Chile (Chl) v Guarani (Par)
1-0, 3-2 (agg 4-2)

Winners qualified for group stage

Group stage

Group 1

Feb 11
Universitario (Per) 0
Velez Sarsfield (Arg) 1 (Canteros 81)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Zambrano (Ecu)

Feb 13
Atletico Paranaense (Bra) 1 (Paulinho Dias 24)
The Strongest (Bol) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Fedorczuk (Uru)

Feb 20
The Strongest 1 (Wayar 71)
Universitario 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Quintana (Par)

Feb 25
Velez Sarsfield 2 (Tobio 38, Pratto 79)
Atletico Paranaense 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Silvera (Uru)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Velez Sarsfield	2	2	0	0	3	0	6
The Strongest	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
At Paranaense	2	1	0	1	1	2	3
Universitario	2	0	0	2	0	2	0

Group 2

Feb 11
Botafogo (Bra) 2 (Ferreyra 30, Wallyson 52)
San Lorenzo (Arg) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Silvera (Uru)

Feb 18
Independiente (Ecu) 2 (Sornoza pen 31, Guerrero 58)
Union Espanola (Chl) 2 (Jaime 54, Chavez 59)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Orosco (Bol)
Sent off: Canales (Espanola) 74min

Feb 26
Union Espanola 1 (Chavez 75)
Botafogo 1 (Ferreyra 86)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Soto (Ven)

Feb 27
San Lorenzo 1 (Correa 56)
Independiente 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Caceres (Par)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Botafogo	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
San Lorenzo	2	1	0	1	1	2	3
Espanola	2	0	2	0	3	3	2
Independiente	2	0	1	1	2	3	1

Group 3

Feb 12
Deportivo Cali (Col) 1 (Viafara 73)
Cerro Porteno (Par) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Oliveira (Bra)

Feb 13
Lanus (Arg) 0
O'Higgins (Chl) 0
Ref: Maldonado (Bol)

Feb 19
O'Higgins 1 (Opazo 83)
Deportivo Cali 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Marques Ribeiro (Bra)

Feb 26
Cerro Porteno 3 (Guiza 46, Dos Santos 50, pen 56)
Lanus 1 (Ortiz 59)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Lopes (Bra)
Sent off: A Romero (Cerro Porteno) 66min

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
O'Higgins	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Cerro Porteno	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Dep Cali	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Lanus	2	0	1	1	1	3	1

Group 4

Feb 11
Independiente Santa Fe (Col) 3 (Mendez 58, Torres 59, Copete 81)
Nacional (Par) 1 (Martinez pen 78)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Delfino (Arg)

Feb 11
Zamora (Ven) 0
Atletico Mineiro (Bra) 1 (Jo 88)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Vigliano (Arg)

Feb 20
Nacional 1 (Melgarejo 10)
Zamora 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ferreyra (Uru)

Feb 26
Atletico Mineiro 2 (Jo 62, Neto Berola 87)
Independiente Santa Fe 1 (Perez 60)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Fedorczuk (Uru)
Sent off: Medina (Santa Fe) 45min

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
At Mineiro	2	2	0	0	3	1	6
Ind Santa Fe	2	1	0	1	4	3	3
Nacional (Par)	2	1	0	1	2	3	3
Zamora	2	0	0	2	0	2	0

Group 5

Feb 12
Real Garcilaso (Per) 2 (Britez 52, Rodriguez 62)
Cruzeiro (Bra) 1 (Bruno Rodrigo 20)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Argote (Ven)

Feb 13
Universidad de Chile (Chl) 1 (Lorenzetti 82)
Defensor Sporting (Uru) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Caceres (Par)

EL SALVADOR

Reyes' league best

Williams Reyes has set a new league record, with his equaliser for Dragon in their 1-1 draw away to Isidro Metapan taking his career tally to 241 goals.

The 37-year-old, who rejoined Dragon in January from FAS, said after the game: "Many things came to my mind and it made me want to cry from emotion. Not just for the historical significance, but because we are also fighting to detach ourselves from the bottom places."

MALAWI

Three in a row

Silver Strikers clinched their third consecutive Super League title, beating Mighty Wanderers 2-1 behind closed doors.

The game was rearranged after their match in December was abandoned because of crowd violence. The original game ended after 61 minutes following disturbances in which one fan was killed.

The Malawi Football Association ruled that Strikers will start the new season on minus nine points, with Wanderers docked six points, for the crowd trouble.

Cup holder...FFA's David Gallop

AUSTRALIA

National cup starts

The first-ever Australian FFA Cup Final will be staged on December 16.

More than 600 teams were involved as the national knockout tournament got underway,

Feb 19
Defensor Sporting 4 (Correa 36, Gedoz 46, Olivera 70, 86)
Real Garcilaso 1 (Ramua 21)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Zambrano (Ecu)
Sent off: Ramua (Garcilaso) 65min

Feb 25
Cruzeiro 5 (Ricardo Goulart 34, 43, 85, Dagoberto 39, Willian 90)
Universidad de Chile 1 (Lorenzetti 66)
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Laverni (Arg)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 5

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cruzeiro	2	1	0	1	6	3	3
Defensor	2	1	0	1	4	2	3
Real Garcilaso	2	1	0	1	3	5	3
Univ de Chile	2	1	0	1	2	5	3

Group 6

Feb 13
Atletico Nacional (Col) 1 (Cardona 82)
Newell's Old Boys (Arg) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Bascunan (Chl)

Feb 13
Nacional (Uru) 0
Gremio (Bra) 1 (Riveros 69)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Arias (Par)

Feb 25
Gremio 3 (Luan 29, Ramiro 65, Ruiz 89)
Atletico Nacional 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Polic (Chl)

Feb 27
Newell's Old Boys 4 (Rodriguez 14, Curbelo og 45+1, Bernardi 54, Orzan 87)
Nacional 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Osses (Chl)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 6

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gremio	2	2	0	0	4	0	6
Newell's	2	1	0	1	4	1	3
At Nacional	2	1	0	1	1	3	3
Nacional (Uru)	2	0	0	2	0	5	0

Group 7

Feb 12
Leon (Mex) 2 (Boselli pen 32, Arizala 68)
Flamengo (Bra) 1 (Caceres 43)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Buitrago (Col)
Sent off: Amaral (Flamengo) 12min

Feb 13
Emelec (Ecu) 2 (Mena 12, Gimenez 74)
Bolivar (Bol) 1 (Callejon 11)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Polic (Chl)

Feb 19
Bolivar 1 (Callejon 67)
Leon 1 (Boselli 3)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Garay (Per)

Feb 26
Flamengo 3 (Elano 11, Hernane 55, Everton 82)
Emelec 1 (Escalada 88)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Pitana (Arg)
Sent off: Achilier (Emelec) 73min

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 7

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Leon	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Flamengo	2	1	0	1	4	3	3
Emelec	2	1	0	1	3	4	3
Bolivar	2	0	1	1	2	3	1

Group 8

Feb 11
Santos Laguna (Mex) 1 (Peralta 19)
Arsenal (Arg) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Velez (Col)

Feb 12
Anzoategui (Ven) 1 (Villegas 39)
Penarol (Uru) 1 (Zalayeta 79)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Lara (Ecu)
Sent off: E Hernandez (Anzoategui) 81min

Feb 18
Penarol 0
Santos Laguna 2 (Lacerda 54, Abella 90+1)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Lopes (Bra)

Feb 25
Arsenal 3 (Furch 16, Carrera 43, Caraglio 51)
Anzoategui 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Carrillo (Per)
Sent off: Calzadilla (Anzoategui) 45min

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 8

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Santos Laguna	2	2	0	0	3	0	6
Arsenal	2	1	0	1	3	1	3
Penarol	2	0	1	1	1	3	1
Anzoategui	2	0	1	1	1	4	1

Top 2 in each group qualify for 1st knockout round

ARGENTINA

2nd tournament

Feb 7: Estudiantes 1 Arsenal 0; Velez 0 Tigre 0; Olimpa 2 San Lorenzo 0.
Feb 8: Argentinos 2 Godoy Cruz 1; Rafaela 1 All Boys 1; Racing 3 Colon 0.
Feb 9: Quilmes 0 Rosario 1; Newell's 0 Boca 0; River Plate 1 Gimnasia 0.
Feb 10: Belgrano 2 Lanus 2.
Feb 14: Godoy Cruz 2 Quilmes 0.
Feb 15: All Boys 0 Estudiantes 1; Arsenal 1 Velez 3; Tigre 0 Olimpo 0; San Lorenzo 1 Racing 0; Colon 1 Argentinos 0.
Feb 16: Lanus 0 Rafaela 3; Gimnasia 3 Newell's 0; Rosario 1 River Plate 1; Boca 2 Belgrano 3.
Feb 18: Olimpo 0 Arsenal 2; Velez 3 All Boys 0; Racing 0 Tigre 1.
Feb 19: Quilmes 0 Colon 2; Estudiantes 2 Lanus 1; Argentinos 0 San Lorenzo 2; River Plate 1 Godoy Cruz 2.
Feb 20: Belgrano 1 Newell's 1; Rosario 3 Gimnasia 1; Rafaela 1 Boca 0.
Feb 22: Lanus 3 Velez 2; All Boys 1 Olimpo 0; Arsenal 3 Racing 1.
Feb 23: Newell's 4 Rafaela 1; San Lorenzo 1 Quilmes 0; Boca 1 Estudiantes 0; Colon 3 River Plate 1.
Feb 24: Godoy Cruz 3 Rosario 0; Tigre 0 Argentinos 0; Gimnasia 2 Belgrano 2.
Feb 28: Godoy Cruz 0 Gimnasia 2; Racing 1 All Boys 1.
Mar 1: Argentinos 2 Arsenal 0; Velez 1 Boca 0; Rafaela 1 Belgrano 2; Rosario 0 Colon 1.
Mar 2: Quilmes 1 Tigre 0; Olimpo 2 Lanus 0; River Plate 1 San Lorenzo 0; Estudiantes 0 Newell's 0.

ARGENTINA – 2ND TOURNAMENT

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Colon	5	4	0	1	7	4	12
Velez	5	3	1	1	9	4	10
Estudiantes	5	3	1	1	4	2	10
Godoy Cruz	5	3	0	2	8	5	9
Belgrano	5	2	3	0	10	8	9
San Lorenzo	5	3	0	2	4	3	9
Gimnasia	5	2	1	2	8	6	7
Olimpo	5	2	1	2	4	3	7
Rafaela	5	2	1	2	7	7	7
Argentinos	5	2	1	2	4	4	7
River Plate	5	2	1	2	5	6	7
Rosario	5	2	1	2	5	6	7
Newell's	5	1	3	1	5	5	6
Tigre	5	1	3	1	1	1	6
Arsenal	5	2	0	3	6	7	6
All Boys	5	1	2	2	3	6	5
Racing	5	1	1	3	5	6	4
Boca	5	1	1	3	3	5	4
Lanus	5	1	1	3	6	11	4
Quilmes	5	1	0	4	1	6	3

19-round tournament (19x1); the 3 teams with the worst points-per-game average over the 3 most recent seasons will be relegated

CONCACAF

ANTIGUA & BARBUDA

ANTIGUA & BARBUDA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
SAP (C)	18	14	4	0	43	13	46
Parham	18	12	2	4	38	18	38
Hoppers	18	11	1	6	38	20	34
Grenades	18	8	3	7	34	23	27
Bassa	18	7	4	7	30	28	25
Fort Road	18	7	2	9	34	39	23
Old Road	18	5	7	6	25	23	22
Willikies[1]	18	5	2	11	17	31	17
All Saints (R)	18	4	5	9	17	40	17
Potters T'rs (R)	18	1	2	15	16	57	5

[1] *Willikies enter rel/prom play-offs*

BELIZE

Apertura championship Final, 1st leg

Feb 2
FC Belize 1 (Leslie 62)
Belmopan Bandits 1 (McCaulay 5)
HT: 0-1

Apertura championship Final, 2nd leg

Feb 8
Belmopan Bandits 5 (McCaulay 37, pen 67, 69, 71, Casey 45)
FC Belize 1 (Leslie 39)
HT: 2-1
Belmopan Bandits 6-2 on agg
Sent off: Grant (FC Belize) 48min

MEXICO

Clausura

Regular season

Feb 7: Tijuana 2 Monterrey 1.
Feb 8: America 0 Pachuca 1; Tigres 1 Santos 1; Leon 1 Pumas 2; Atlas 1 Morelia 1.
Feb 9: Toluca 2 Chiapas 0; Puebla 0 Guadalajara 1; Atlante 1 Cruz Azul 4; Queretaro 2 Veracruz 0.
Feb 14: Morelia 1 America 0; Santos 3 Tijuana 2.
Feb 15: Cruz Azul 1 Puebla 0; Veracruz 0 Toluca 3; Pachuca 0 Atlante 1; Monterrey 0 Leon 2; Chiapas 0 Tigres 0.
Feb 16: Pumas 1 Atlas 1; Guadalajara 2 Queretaro 1.
Feb 21: Queretaro 1 Cruz Azul 3; Tijuana 0 Chiapas 3.
Feb 22: America 1 Pumas 3; Tigres 1 Veracruz 0; Pachuca 3 Morelia 0; Leon 4 Santos 2; Atlas 0 Monterrey 1.
Feb 23: Toluca 1 Guadalajara 0; Atlante 0 Puebla 0.
Feb 28: Morelia 1 Atlante 2; Santos 2 Atlas 3.
Mar 1: Veracruz 1 Tijuana 1; Cruz Azul 1 Toluca 0; Monterrey 1 America 2; Chiapas 0 Leon 3.
Mar 2: Puebla 1 Queretaro 0; Pumas 0 Pachuca 0; Guadalajara 0 Tigres 0.

MEXICO – CLAUSURA: REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cruz Azul	9	8	1	0	18	3	25
Toluca	9	6	1	2	13	5	19
Pumas	9	4	3	2	13	9	15
America	9	5	0	4	10	8	15
Leon	9	4	2	3	15	10	14
Pachuca	9	4	2	3	9	5	14
Guadalajara	9	3	4	2	7	7	13
Atlante	9	3	3	3	8	10	12
Chiapas	9	3	2	4	8	10	11
Tijuana	9	3	2	4	8	13	11
Santos	9	2	4	3	12	13	10
Puebla	9	2	4	3	7	8	10
Queretaro	9	3	1	5	7	10	10
Atlas	9	2	3	4	8	11	9
Monterrey	9	2	3	4	7	10	9
Morelia	9	2	3	4	7	10	9
Tigres	9	1	5	3	3	8	8
Veracruz	9	1	3	5	5	15	6

17-round regular season (17x1); top 8 will enter championship play-offs, the team with the worst points-per-game average over the 3 most recent seasons will be relegated

AFRICA

AFRICAN SUPER CUP

(Champions League holders, Al Ahly v Confederation Cup holders, CS Sfaxien)

Feb 20 - Cairo (International)
Al Ahly (Egy) 3 (Gedo 23, Gamal 54, 69)
CS Sfaxien (Tun) 2 (Maaloul pen 63, Ben Youssef 78)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 30,000. **Ref:** Doue (IvC)

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary round

1st legs - Feb 7-9; 2nd legs - Feb 14-16
AC Leopards (Con) v Rayon Sports (Rwa) 0-0, 2-2 (agg 2-2, AC Leopards on away goals); Al Ahly Benghazi (Lby) v Foullah Edifice (Chd) 4-0, 0-2 (agg 4-2); Al Merrikh (Sud) v Kampala City Council (Uga) 0-2, 2-1 (agg 2-3); AS Vita (DRC) v Kano Pillars (Nga) 3-1, 1-2 (agg 4-3); Asante Kotoko (Gha) v Barrack Young Controllers (Lbr) 2-1, 0-1 (agg 2-2, Barrack Young Controllers on away goals); Berekum Chelsea (Gha) v Atlabara (SSu) 2-0, 0-2 (agg 2-2, Berekum Chelsea 3-0 on pens); Dedebit (Eth) v KMKM (Zan) 3-0, 0-2 (agg 3-2); Diables Noirs (Con) v Flambeau de l'Est (Bdi) 0-1, 1-1 (agg 1-2); Diambars (Sen) v ASFA Yennenga (BuF) 1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1, ASFA Yennenga 4-2 on pens); Dynamos (Zim) v Mochudi Centre Chiefs (Bot) 3-0, 1-1 (agg 4-1); Enyimba (Nga) v Anges de Notse (Tog) 3-1, 1-2 (agg 4-3); FAR Rabat (Mor) v Real Bamako (Mli) 2-2, 1-1 (agg 3-3, Real Bamako on away goals); Gor Mahia (Ken) v US Bitam (Gab) 1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1, Gor Mahia 3-1 on pens); Kabuscorp (Ang) v Cote d'Or (Sey) 5-1, 2-1 (agg 7-2); Kaizer Chiefs (Saf) v Black Africa (Nam) 3-0, 1-1 (agg 4-1); Les Astres (Cam) v Akonangui (EqG) 3-0, 1-0 (agg 4-0); Liga Muculmana (Moz) v CNaPS (Mad) 1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0); Mbabane Swallows (Swa)

Successful defence...Sanfrecce

with 22 of these going through to join the 10 A-League clubs in the round of 32, which will be played in late July.

JAPAN

Sanfrecce success

Sanfrecce Hiroshima retained the Japanese Super Cup, beating Yokohama F Marinos 2-0 with goals from teenage strikers Gakuto Notsuda and Takuma Asano.

NEPAL

Seventh heaven

Manang Marshyangdi Club are national champions for a record seventh time, finishing a point ahead of Machhindra to ensure their place in the group stage of this year's AFC President's Cup.

PAKISTAN

KRL top again

KRL won the Pakistan Premier League for a third consecutive season, clinching the title with a game to spare.

Runners-up in last year's AFC President's Cup, KRL qualify for the group stage of the 2014 tournament, which begins in May.

v Nkana (Zam) 2-0, 2-5 (agg 4-5); Nouadhibou (Mra) v Horoya (Gui) 1-1, 0-3 (agg 1-4); Primeiro Agosto (Ang) v Lioli (Les) 2-0, 1-2 (agg 3-2); Raja Casablanca (Mor) v Diamond Stars (SLe) 6-0, 2-1 (agg 8-1); Sporting Praia Cruz[1] (STP) v Stade Malien (Mli) 3-2, 0-5 (agg 3-7); Young Africans (Tan) v Komorozine (Com) 7-0, 5-2 (agg 12-2); Zamalek (Egy) v AS Douanes (Nig) 2-0, 1-0 (agg 3-0)
[1]Replaced USM El Harrach (Alg), who withdrew after the draw was made

ES Setif (Alg) v Steve Biko (Gam) –
Steve Biko withdrew, ES Setif go through
Sewe Sport (IvC) v Os Balantas (GuB) –
Os Balantas withdrew, Sewe Sport go through

Byes to 1st round: Al Ahly (Egy; holders), Al Hilal (Sud), Coton Sport (Cam), CS Sfaxien (Tun), Esperance (Tun), TP Mazembe (DRC)

MALAWI

MALAWI – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Silver S'kers (C)	28	16	5	7	38	16	53
Moyale B'cks	28	15	5	8	47	23	50
MAFCO	28	14	7	7	41	31	49
Kamuzu B'cks	28	13	8	7	42	29	47
Blue Eagles	28	13	8	7	32	25	47
Mighty Wand'rs	28	12	9	7	26	22	45
Red Lions	28	11	9	8	36	30	42
Big Bullets	28	10	11	7	34	25	41
Azam Tigers	28	9	12	7	24	21	39
CIVO United	28	9	9	10	28	22	36
EPAC United	28	10	6	12	38	36	36
Blantyre Utd	28	8	6	14	27	42	30
Mponela (R)	28	6	8	14	29	43	26
Evirom (R)	28	5	5	18	22	47	20
Mzuzu (R)	28	2	6	20	22	74	12

ASIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group stage

1st matchday

Group A
Feb 25: Al Jazira (UAE) 3 Al Rayyan (Qat) 2; Esteghlal (Irn) 0 Al Shabab (Sau) 1.

Group B
Feb 25: Al Fateh (Sau) 0 Bunyodkor (Uzb) 0; El Jaish (Qat) 0 Foolad Khouzestan (Irn) 0.

Group C
Feb 26: Al Ain (UAE) 2 Lekhwiya (Qat) 1; Tractor Sazi (Irn) 1 Al Ittihad (Sau) 0.

Group D
Feb 26: Al Hilal (Sau) 2 Al Ahli (UAE) 2; Al Sadd (Qat) 3 Sepahan (Irn) 1.

Group E
Feb 25: Pohang Steelers (SKo) 1 Cerezo Osaka (Jap) 1; Shandong Luneng (Chn) 1 Buriram United (Tha) 1.

Group F
Feb 25: Sanfrecce Hiroshima (Jap) 1 Beijing Guoan (Chn) 1; Seoul (SKo) 2 Central Coast Mariners (Aus) 0.

Group G
Feb 26: Guangzhou Evergrande (Chn) 4 Melbourne Victory (Aus) 2; Jeonbuk Motors (SKo) 3 Yokohama F Marinos (Jap) 0.

Group H
Feb 26: Kawasaki Frontale (Jap) 1 Guizhou Renhe (Chn) 0; Western Sydney Wanderers (Aus) 1 Ulsan Hyundai (SKo) 3.

Remaining matchdays: *Mar 11/12, Mar 18/19, Apr 1/2, Apr 15/16, Apr 22/23*

Top 2 in each group qualify for 1st knockout round

AUSTRALIA

Regular season
Feb 7: Western Sydney 1 Brisbane 1.
Feb 8: Central Coast 1 Melbourne Victory 3; Sydney 0 Adelaide 3.
Feb 9: Newcastle 2 Wellington Phoenix 3; Melbourne Heart 2 Perth 1.
Feb 14: Adelaide 2 Central Coast 0.
Feb 15: Sydney 2 Perth 1.
Feb 16: Wellington Phoenix 0 Melbourne Heart 5; Brisbane 0 Newcastle 1.
Feb 21: Central Coast 1 Wellington Phoenix 4.
Feb 22: Newcastle 0 Sydney 2; Melbourne Victory 4 Adelaide 3; Perth 0 Western Sydney 2.
Feb 23: Melbourne Heart 1 Brisbane 0.
Feb 27: Adelaide 5 Wellington Phoenix 1.
Feb 28: Brisbane 3 Perth 1.
Mar 1: Central Coast 2 Sydney 1; Melbourne Heart 4 Melbourne Victory 0.
Mar 2: Western Sydney 0 Newcastle 2.

AUSTRALIA – REGULAR SEASON

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brisbane	21	13	2	6	36	19	41
West Sydney	21	9	7	5	25	21	34
Adelaide	21	8	6	7	38	29	30
Central Coast	21	8	6	7	22	27	30
Melbourne V	21	8	6	7	30	36	30
Sydney	21	9	1	11	28	30	28
Wellington P	21	7	5	9	31	34	26
Newcastle	21	7	5	9	22	27	26
Melbourne H	21	6	6	9	28	30	24
Perth	21	5	6	10	20	27	21

27-round regular season (9x3); top 6 will enter championship play-offs; no relegation from this league

JAPAN

League: 1st matchday
Mar 1: Vegalta 1 Albirex 2; Ventforet 0 Kashima 4; Nagoya 2 Shimizu 3; Cerezo 0 Sanfrecce 1; Sagan 5 Tokushima 0; Kashiwa 1 Tokyo 1; Gamba 0 Urawa 1.
Mar 2: Yokohama 2 Omiya 0; Kawasaki 2 Vissel 2.

NEPAL

NEPAL – FINAL[1]

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Manang M (C)	17	11	2	4	31	13	35
Machhindra	17	10	4	3	26	12	34
Three Star	17	9	5	3	24	15	32
Nepal Police	17	7	5	5	25	14	26
Sankata	17	6	6	5	17	13	24
Armed Police	17	6	4	7	24	27	22
H'yan Sherpa	12	4	4	4	16	16	16
Friends	12	4	3	5	13	14	15
Saraswoti Yth	12	4	3	5	9	13	15
Nepal Army	12	2	7	3	12	11	13
Jawalakhel Yth	12	4	1	7	9	20	13
RCT[2] (R)	12	2	1	9	10	24	4
Boys Union (R)	12	1	1	10	8	32	4

[1]The top 6 after the 12-round regular season all played each other once, for a total of 17 rounds
[2]3pts deducted for not entering a cup competition

PAKISTAN

PAKISTAN – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
KRL (C)	30	21	6	3	53	9	69
KESC	30	18	10	2	47	20	64
WAPDA	30	17	12	1	42	14	63
Air Force	30	15	8	7	44	26	53
Army	30	13	10	7	36	23	49
Int'l Airlines	30	13	7	10	45	40	46
Muslim	30	12	8	10	32	32	44
KPT	30	10	8	12	64	52	38
National Bank	30	9	10	11	25	25	37
Afghan	30	9	9	12	35	36	36
Habib Bank (R)	30	9	8	13	26	33	35
Navy (R)	30	9	8	13	28	36	35
PACA (R)	30	4	12	14	22	44	24
Lyallpur (R)	30	5	8	17	24	48	23
Baloch N'ki (R)	30	5	5	20	21	60	20
ZTBL (R)	30	4	5	21	16	62	17

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions
(R) = relegated

FORTHCOMING FIXTURES

April 1 and 2
UEFA Champions League quarter-finals, 1st leg; AFC Champions League group games
April 1, 2 and 3
Libertadores Cup group games; CONCACAF Champions League semi-finals, 1st leg
April 3
Europa League quarter-finals, 1st leg
April 8 and 9
UEFA Champions League quarter-finals, 2nd leg
April 8, 9 and 10
Libertadores Cup group games; CONCACAF Champions League semi-finals, 2nd leg
April 10
Europa League quarter-finals, 2nd leg
April 15 and 16
AFC Champions League group games
April 15, 16 and 17
Libertadores Cup round of 16, 1st legs; CONCACAF Champions League Final, 1st leg
April 16
Spanish Cup Final: Barcelona v Real Madrid
April 18
French League Cup Final: Lyon v Paris S-G
April 19
UEFA Youth League Final
April 22 and 23
UEFA Champions League semi-finals, 1st leg; AFC Champions League group games
April 22, 23 and 24
Libertadores Cup round of 16, 1st and 2nd legs; CONCACAF Champions League Final, 2nd leg
April 24
Europa League semi-finals, 1st leg
April 29 and 30
UEFA Champions League semi-finals, 2nd leg; Libertadores Cup round of 16, 2nd leg

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THE QUALIFIERS ALGERIA

In better shape than four years ago

The Desert Foxes are looking forward to a second successive finals appearance. By Mark Gleeson

We're on our way...Bougherra (no2) wheels away after scoring the only goal of the second leg against Burkina Faso

While Algeria were perhaps fortunate to gain a place at the 2010 finals, qualification for a second successive tournament was hard earned and merited.

Four years ago Algeria emerged from a long-term slump to earn a surprise berth, edging past Egypt in a shock result, and since then they have returned to a prominent place among the leading lights of African football.

They have been highly ranked for much of the last 24 months, but hopes that they would turn that computer-generated assessment of their potential into reality at last year's African Nations Cup finals in South Africa proved a deep disappointment as they did not even make it to the knockout stage. However, they shrugged off that let-down and embarrassment and went on to get the better of a strong Mali side in the World Cup qualifiers later in the year. After that they beat Burkina Faso in the play-offs, albeit having come within the width of a post from being eliminated.

They were unfortunate to go 3-2 down away in the first leg to a dodgy penalty call, but at 1-0 in the return they were set to qualify, hanging on precariously at the end when the Burkinabe struck the woodwork in stoppage time. Had the ball gone in, the game would have ended 1-1 and the tie 3-2 in the visitors' favour. But over the three hours of football, Algeria deserved their triumph on the away-goals rule and brought a satisfactory close to a year that had started disastrously for "*Les Fennecs*" (the desert foxes).

The next crisis, it would seem, is never far away where Algeria are concerned though, and there was much speculation in January that coach Vahid Halilhodzic might be dismissed. He has, however, been kept on for now by the all-powerful football association president, Mohamed Raouraoua, who seems exasperated by the moods and demands of the Franco-Bosnian but is also mindful that a change at this late stage would not serve his country's hopes of a reputable result in Brazil.

Raouraoua has actively continued his almost one-man campaign to recruit players in Europe of Algerian descent to bolster a squad that is now a majority French-born.

The likes of Zinedine Zidane, Karim Benzema and Samir Nasri might have slipped through the net in the past, but Algeria have assiduously courted many French-born junior internationals who are of Algerian descent. The latest two to commit to their cause come from Internazionale: striker Ishak Belfodil, who is on loan at Livorno, and midfielder Saphir Taider.

Algeria will carry the hopes of the Arabic-speaking world as the only side from north Africa and the Middle East to qualify for Brazil. Yet while expectations will be greater than in South Africa four years ago, their chances of creating an upset on the same scale as their famous 1982 win over West Germany in Spain are slim at best. **WS**

For the record

QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN
SECOND ROUND, GROUP H

02.06.12	Rwanda (h)	4-0
10.06.12	Mali (a)	1-2
26.03.13	Benin (h)	3-1
09.06.13	Benin (a)	3-1
16.06.13	Rwanda (a)	1-0
10.09.13	Mali (h)	1-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Algeria	6	5	0	1	13	4	15
Mali	6	2	2	2	7	7	8
Benin	6	2	2	2	8	9	8
Rwanda	6	0	2	4	3	11	2

THIRD ROUND

12.10.13	Burkina Faso (a)	2-3
19.11.13	Burkina Faso (h)	1-0*

(* won on away goals)

Players used in qualifiers

EIGHT GAMES
Carl MEDJANI (720 mins)
SEVEN
Rais M'BOLHI (630 mins), Sofiane FEGHOULI (600 mins), El Arabi Hillel SOUDANI (543 mins), Islam SLIMANI (472 mins)
SIX
Djamel MESBAH (536 mins), Mehdi MOSTEFA (506 mins), Madjid BOUGHERRA (540 mins), Saphir TAIDER (456 mins), Adlene GUEDIOURA (382 mins)
FIVE
Medhi LACEN (365 mins), Foued KADIR (129 mins)
FOUR
Essaid BELKALEM (360 mins), Rafik DJEBBOUR (144 mins)
THREE
Yacine BRAHIMI (207 mins), Hassan YEBDA (204 mins), Faouzi GHOULAM (199 mins)
TWO
Ismael BOUZID (180 mins), Nacereddine KHOUALED (180 mins), Ryad BOUDEBOUZ (125 mins), Nabil GHILAS (106 mins), Abdelmoumene DJABOU (90 mins)
ONE
Abderahmane HACHOUD (90 mins), Mohamed ZEMMAMOUCHE (90 mins), Hameur BOUAZZA (31 mins), Amir KARAOUI (26 mins), Khaled LEMMOUCHIA (24 mins), Hemza KOUDRI (19 mins), Hocine EL ORFI (2 mins), Ishak BELFODIL (1 min)

SCORERS IN QUALIFIERS
FIVE GOALS
Islam SLIMANI
THREE
Sofiane FEGHOULI, El Arabi Hillel SOUDANI
TWO
Saphir TAIDER
ONE
Madjid BOUGHERRA, Nabil GHILAS, Carl MEDJANI

The coach

Vahid Halilhodzic

Qualified Ivory Coast for the last World Cup in South Africa but was fired just months before the finals after the team flopped at the African Nations Cup. Has had run-ins with the Algerian FA but looks to be tenuously holding onto his post until Brazil. A member of Yugoslavia's side at the 1982 finals in Spain, he was born in Bosnia but is a long-time French citizen who has coached in Ligue 1 and across Africa.

Clinging on...Halilhodzic

The key players

Madjid Bougherra

He may be past his best, and playing his club football in the relative calm of Qatar these days, but even at 31 his contribution to the Algeria side cannot be underestimated. He scored the decisive goal in the qualifiers and brings an unbridled passion to the national cause.

Sofiane Feghouli

A silky midfielder who has been named as a potential Manchester United transfer target – a result of his reputation in La Liga with Valencia and across the African continent. He is the heartbeat of the side, revelling in the playmaker role.

Playmaker...Feghouli

French graduate...Ghoulam

Faouzi Ghoulam

Moved from Saint-Etienne to Napoli for €5million in the January transfer window to plug a hole at left-back. He is yet another player raised in the French youth system who has opted to represent Algeria.

Saphir Taider

A France junior international who was courted by Algeria and persuaded to join up during the qualifying campaign, where he featured in six key matches.

Switch...French-born Taider has answered the call of his mother's native land

The unanswered questions

Will the coach stay?

Halilhodzic has had his problems with the Algeria FA, but appears to be their choice to lead the side in Brazil...for the moment.

Are their hearts in it?

With so many French-born players in the side, critics will perhaps start to question their passion for their adopted country if performances don't meet expectations.

Have past lessons been learned?

Algeria have a habit of imploding at the first sign of adversity. There is no sign yet that this problem has been rectified.

Reasons to be cheerful

Backing...Algeria supporters in tune during the qualifiers

Strength in depth

Algeria's squad has depth and there is a growing realisation that their potential could turn them into an African giant.

The pressure is off

There is no burden of expectation from supporters who are too cynical after decades of bitter disappointment, and so no overwhelming pressure on the side.

A decent draw

A relatively easy travel programme awaits, and in a group with Belgium, Russia and South Korea they will believe they have a chance to advance to the knockout stage.

Reasons to be fearful

No reliable goalscorer

A lack of a recognised striker has been a burden for the side for several years now, manifesting itself in regular displays of extraordinarily poor finishing.

Pride and passion

Algeria's national team is a collection of young Frenchmen who only know about the land they represent from their parents and grandparents – and perhaps not intimately enough themselves.

Another miss...at South Africa 2010

Poor recent finals form

No past form apart from 1982, when they did so well in Spain, and 1990, when winning the African Nations Cup at home.

THE QUALIFIERS CROATIA

Big test ahead for inexperienced coach

Appointed just before the play-offs, Niko Kovac is very much a novice boss. By Zdravko Reic

Suspended...Mandzukic's red card against Iceland means he will miss Croatia's opening World Cup game, against Brazil

As a nation of just 4.4million people, Croatians are fiercely proud of their sporting prowess, particularly the national football team's eighth qualification for a major finals. And by providing the opposition for the hosts in the opening game of the 2014 tournament, they believe they have the ideal opportunity to remind the world of their abilities.

Having only ever failed to progress through a qualifying tournament twice before – for Euro 2000 and the 2010 World Cup – confidence was high when coach Igor Stimac's side began with 16 points from a possible 18 in their first six games on the road to Brazil. However, three losses and a draw in the remaining four fixtures saw Croatia condemned to the play-offs and Stimac replaced by under-21s boss Niko Kovac.

Although second place in the group might have been expected at the outset, with Belgium most people's favourites to qualify automatically, there was still plenty of disappointment at the way in which Stimac's side fell away at the end of the campaign.

After a shock 1-0 loss at home to Scotland, in Zagreb, there was a feeling that the players, knowing that second place was theirs, were far too relaxed. Fortunately, normal service was resumed in the play-offs and, after a potentially tricky away leg, Iceland were dispatched 2-0 in an efficient manner in the return.

But that victory was soured by the actions of defender Josip Simunic, who grabbed a microphone at the end of the game and greeted supporters with a cry of "*Za dom*" (for the home), to which those in the stands replied "*Spremni*" (ready). This was reminiscent of the salute used by the fascist Ustasha movement during the second world war and Simunic's gesture was punished with a 10-match ban by FIFA. This has denied the 36-year-old the chance to play in his third World Cup finals and severely stretched Croatia's resources.

Mario Mandzukic, who was sent off during that second leg against Iceland, was also penalised by FIFA, although the striker's one-match ban means he will only miss the opening game of the finals.

At 42, new coach Kovac may be inexperienced but he is full of enthusiasm and has a great desire to prove himself. He has, however, warned against any further complacency and stated that "a place in the last 16 is not a given".

Third at the 1998 finals in France, Croatia have struggled to reach such heights since and it is thought that Kovac may use this summer to mould a side in preparation for Euro 2016.

Stimac was a great believer in giving youth a chance and he launched the international careers of such talents as Mateo Kovacic, Josip Radosevic and Ante Rebic. This summer, all eyes will be on the country's latest teenager sensation, Alen Halilovic. **WS**

For the record

QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN
GROUP A

07.09.12	Macedonia (h)	1-0
11.09.12	Belgium (a)	1-1
12.10.12	Macedonia (a)	2-1
16.10.12	Wales (h)	2-0
22.03.13	Serbia (h)	2-0
26.03.13	Wales (a)	2-1
07.06.13	Scotland (h)	0-1
06.09.13	Serbia (a)	1-1
11.10.13	Belgium (h)	1-2
15.10.13	Scotland (a)	0-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Belgium	10	8	2	0	18	4	26
Croatia	10	5	2	3	12	9	17
Serbia	10	4	2	4	18	11	14
Scotland	10	3	2	5	8	12	11
Wales	10	3	1	6	9	20	10
M'donia	10	2	1	7	7	16	7

PLAY-OFFS

15.11.13	Iceland (a)	0-0
19.11.13	Iceland (h)	2-0

Players used in qualifiers

TWELVE MATCHES
Stipe PLETIKOSA (1,080 mins), Mario MANDZUKIC (994 mins)
ELEVEN
Darijo SRNA (990 mins), Luka MODRIC (982 mins)
TEN
Ivan RAKITIC (828 mins), Ivan PERISIC (691 mins)

NINE
Vedran CORLUKA (810 mins), Josip SIMUNIC (801 mins), Ivan STRINIC (764 mins)
SEVEN
Ivica OLIC (436 mins), EDUARDO (431 mins), Dejan LOVREN (415 mins), Ognjen VUKOJEVIC (403 mins)

SIX
Mateo KOVACIC (376 mins), Domagoj VIDA (314 mins), Niko KRANJCAR (203 mins), Nikica JELAVIC (184 mins)
FIVE
Nikola KALINIC (144 mins)
FOUR
Gordon SCHILDENFELD (270 mins)

THREE
SAMMIR (176 mins), Milan BADELJ (142 mins)
TWO
Danijel PRANJIC (180 mins), Ante REBIC (34 mins)
ONE
Ivo ILICEVIC (90 mins), Sime VRSALJKO (90 mins), Josip RADOSEVIC (78 mins), Leon BENKO (2 mins)

SCORERS IN QUALIFIERS
FOUR GOALS
Mario MANDZUKIC
TWO
EDUARDO
ONE
Vedran CORLUKA, Nikica JELAVIC, Niko KRANJCAR, Dejan LOVREN, Ivica OLIC, Ivan PERISIC, Ivan RAKITIC, Darijo SRNA

The coach

Recent appointment...Kovac

Niko Kovac

Born in Germany, he was captain of Croatia's national side – leading the team at the 2006 World Cup – until his retirement in January 2009. He stepped up from coaching the national under-21s to take charge of the seniors in October last year and is assisted by his younger brother, Robert.

The key players

Inspirational...Srna plays a vital role in both defence and attack

Dario Srna

Midfielder and captain who leads by example. He is very reliable in his defensive duties while offering a threat when going forward.

Luka Modric

The team's playmaker, he inspires confidence in his team-mates and Croatia are greatly weakened without the Real Madrid star's creativity.

Valued opinion...Pletikosa

Creative force...Modric

Stipe Pletikosa

Experienced goalkeeper who, along with Srna, is the player whose opinion coach Kovac values most.

Mario Mandzukic

The Bayern Munich striker is a proven match winner, but he can be undisciplined – as demonstrated by the red card he received in the play-off game against Iceland which keeps him out of the opening game in Brazil.

The unanswered questions

Teen sensation...Halilovic

Are the finals a warm-up for Euro 2016?

There is a feeling that Kovac might be tempted to change his team around and use this summer, and the pre-finals friendlies, to prepare his side for the next cycle of European Championship qualifiers.

Will Alen Halilovic get his chance?

Kovac is coming under increasing pressure, not least from Dinamo president Zdravko Mamic, to select the Zagreb-based side's 17-year-old midfield talent.

What happens if Mandzukic and Modric are missing?

With demanding end-of-season schedules in Germany and Spain respectively, Croatia can ill afford to lose either of their star performers.

Reasons to be cheerful

The draw

Despite previous disappointments, Croatia feel that they should progress to the knockout stage alongside hosts Brazil.

Team spirit

While the squad may lack depth, the side are well drilled and have plenty of experience playing together. This, allied to the input of key men Mandzukic and Modric, can make Croatia a dangerous opponent.

Last-chance saloon

With Pletikosa and Olic over 35, and Srna, Eduardo, Vukojevic and Kranjcar all in their 30s, Brazil 2014 presents one final opportunity for many of the side to perform on the big stage.

Finals finale...Olic

Reasons to be fearful

Coaching naivety

Although Kovac has plenty of playing experience, he is very much a coaching novice.

The defence

The suspension of left-back Simunic is a worry and Croatia lack quality in both full-back positions.

Climate conditions

Croatian players will not be used to the heat and excessive humidity, which could be a big advantage for group opponents Brazil, Cameroon and Mexico.

THE QUALIFIERS GHANA

Experienced duo are back in the fold

The return of Boateng and Essien could prove vital this summer. By Mark Gleeson

Back...Boateng celebrates his goal against Egypt in the qualifying play-offs

Ghana looked the most competent of all the teams in the African qualifying campaign, with the emphatic nature in which they reached Brazil giving credence to their aim of becoming the first side from the continent to go past the last eight at the World Cup finals.

The "Black Stars" have done well at major tournaments over recent years, yet always seem to implode at crucial junctures.

That was most definitely the case once again last year at the African Nations Cup finals in South Africa where they failed to reach the Final even though they were one of the competition's big favourites. Despite that disappointment they have kept faith with coach Kwesi Appiah, who has a low profile and has, at times, had to battle to prove his worth in a country where there remains a strident debate over the merits of a foreign coach against the strengths of a local.

Ashanti-born Appiah has an abundance of talent at his disposal, and that has been strengthened by the recent decisions of Michael Essien and Kevin-Prince Boateng to return from their self-imposed periods of exile.

Although he has lacked playing time at club level in recent years, Essien made a remarkable return in a driving midfield role in the play-off against Egypt, allowing Sulley Muntari and Kwadwo Asamoah to adopt more creative roles out wide.

Striker Asamoah Gyan remains a proficient goalscorer, but the team has defensive flaws – including a goalkeeping crisis as their first choice in the preliminaries, Fatau Dauda, has since been dropped because he cannot get a game for his South African club side, Orlando Pirates.

Appiah has set a high standard for himself with talk of leading the Ghanaians into history as the first African team to reach a World Cup semi-final. But Ghana's first task will be to get through arguably the toughest of the first-round groups, in which they must finish ahead of at least two of Germany, Portugal and the USA.

One driving force for the team will doubtlessly be the residual anger at being denied that semi-final spot at the last World Cup, when Luis Suarez's cynical handball on the line in Johannesburg kept out Dominic Adiyiah's goal-bound header. Had that gone in, Ghana would have beaten Uruguay. But Gyan then grazed the top of the crossbar with the resultant spot-kick and Ghana went on to lose in a penalty shoot-out.

That whole episode created a deep wound and for a while hindered Ghana's progress. Now it could become a motivating spur for the west Africans. **WS**

For the record

QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN
SECOND ROUND, GROUP D

01.06.12	Lesotho (h)	7-0
09.06.12	Zambia (a)	0-1
24.03.13	Sudan (h)	4-0
07.06.13	Sudan (a)	3-1
16.06.13	Lesotho (a)	2-0
06.09.13	Zambia (h)	2-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ghana	6	5	0	1	18	3	15
Zambia	6	3	2	1	11	4	11
Lesotho	6	1	2	3	4	15	5
Sudan	6	0	2	4	3	14	2

THIRD ROUND

15.10.13	Egypt (h)	6-1
19.11.13	Egypt (a)	1-2

Players used in qualifiers

EIGHT GAMES
Emmanuel AGYEMANG-BADU (307 mins)
SEVEN
Harrison AFFUL (630 mins), Kwadwo ASAMOAH (595 mins), Sulley MUNTARI (498 mins)
SIX
John BOYE (540 mins), Fatau DAUDA (540 mins), Asamoah GYAN (482 mins)
FIVE
Samuel INKOOM (374 mins), WAKASO Mubarak (231 mins), Christian ATSU (199 mins)
FOUR
Majeed WARIS (348 mins), Daniel OPARE (304 mins), Mohammed RABIU (300 mins), Rashid SUMAILA (192 mins)
THREE
Jerry AKAMINKO (270 mins), Jonathan MENSAH (270 mins), Andre AYEW (230 mins), Michael ESSIEN (215 mins), Dominic ADIYIAH (209 mins)
TWO
Jordan AYEW (180 mins), Adam KWARASEY (180 mins), Isaac VORSAH (180 mins), Derek BOATENG (127 mins), Richmond BOAKYE (122 mins), Richard Kissi BOATENG (115 mins), Anthony ANNAN (53 mins)
ONE
Albert ADOMAH (79 mins), Solomon ASANTE (38 mins) Emmanuel FRIMPONG (24 mins), Kevin-Prince BOATENG (12 mins), Richard MPONG (11 mins)

SCORERS IN QUALIFIERS
SIX GOALS
Asamoah GYAN
THREE
Sulley MUNTARI, Majeed WARIS
TWO
Dominic ADIYIAH, Christian ATSU, Jordan AYEW
ONE
Emmanuel AGYEMANG-BADU, Jerry AKAMINKO, Kwadwo ASAMOAH, Kevin-Prince BOATENG, John BOYE, WAKASO Mubarak
(*plus one own goal*)

The coach

Kwesi Appiah

He was promoted from his position as assistant after Serbian coach Goran Stepanovic was fired in March 2012, having already served as caretaker for several games after the 2010 World Cup. An international defender in his playing days with Asante Kotoko, he came through the Ghanaian FA's coaching structures and led the under-23s to the gold medal at the 2011 All-Africa Games.

Pedigree...Appiah

The key players

Michael Essien

A long hiatus from the international game, plus his irregular appearances at club level, meant the 31-year-old was under some scrutiny when he returned to the fold late last year. However, he delivered a colossal performance in the 6-1 win over Egypt, driving forward from midfield, in surge after surge of attack, as if he were 20 again.

Rejuvenated...Essien

Kwadwo Asamoah

His presence on the left-hand side is a vital component of Ghana's attack. He remains much underrated and could emerge among Africa's best after this World Cup.

Underrated...Asamoah

Finishing prowess...Gyan

Asamoah Gyan

He might have swapped the competitiveness of the English Premier League for easy petrodollars in the United Arab Emirates, but he still has great finishing ability – which is a rarity among top African strikers these days.

Kevin-Prince Boateng

Seen as opportunistic, the jury is still out on his potential value. Played at the last World Cup then "retired" from international football to avoid going to the 2012 and 2013 African Nations Cup finals while at Milan. Suddenly, now that another World Cup beckons, he is back.

The unanswered questions

How good are Africa's sides?

Ghana are seen as the continent's best chance of making an impact in Brazil after a feeble return from African teams at the finals on home soil four years ago.

Will Essien and Boateng be accepted back?

After the pair retired from international football to avoid any club-versus-country conflict, they are both back in the squad, but it remains to be seen whether that will affect the spirit in the dressing room.

Are they too naive?

Although there is plenty of experience on the pitch, such qualities are lacking in the coaching staff.

Reasons to be cheerful

Current form

Ghana will be bursting with self-confidence after an impressive qualifying campaign.

History is on their side

The "Black Stars" begin the tournament in Natal against the USA – who they beat 2-1 in both the 2006 and 2010 World Cup tournaments.

Pay-back time

Angry after beating cheated out of a semi-final place four years ago, Brazil could be where Ghana get what they feel is their just reward.

Hand of fate...Suarez blocks Adiyiah's effort in the 2010 quarter-finals

Reasons to be fearful

The draw

Group G, with Germany and Portugal to get past, plus Jurgen Klinsmann's USA, is one of the finals' toughest.

Getting carried away

Too much boastful talk before the finals could set the side up for a hard fall.

The defence

Ghana's attacking prowess contrasts starkly with worries at the back and the lack of an international-class goalkeeper.

Worry...keeper Dauda has lost place

THE QUALIFIERS HONDURAS

Hard work will be the key

Team spirit will have to make up for a lack of star quality. By Martin Del Palacio Langer

Painful...Oscar Garcia (right) comes off worse in a clash with Mexico's Hector Moreno during the qualifiers

Before the start of the CONCACAF qualifiers, not even the most optimistic Honduras fan expected their team to qualify directly for their second World Cup in a row, beating Mexico in the Estadio Azteca along the way.

At best, given a squad that lacked star names and was composed of many players who seemed to be past their prime, the best-case scenario was that the team could edge an up-and-coming Panama to finish fourth and then battle it out with the champions of Oceania in the play-offs.

Reality ended up being even better than their sweetest dreams. Colombian coach Luis Fernando Suarez's side were able to overcome an endemic inconsistency, punch above their weight at the right time and deservedly book their ticket to Brazil. Their victory away to Mexico – a first in the history of "*La H*"– marked the turning point for a team that had not been entirely convincing.

The feel-good factor continued into the finals draw, in which they were placed in Group F alongside Switzerland, France and Ecuador – after which fans started to dream of reaching the knockout stage.

In reality, taking a look at the quality at Suarez's disposal, Honduras should consider themselves lucky if they manage to improve on their one-point tally from four years ago. While Maynor Figueroa has had a good season at Hull City, the other English-based contingent of the squad have left a lot to be desired. Wilson Palacios has been a shadow of his former self at Stoke City, Roger Espinoza has struggled to get into Wigan Athletic's starting line-up in the Championship and Juan Carlos Garcia has rarely played at the same club. At least Emilio Izaguirre has been decent at Celtic.

The rest of the squad is made up of local-league players, and those that ply their trade in MLS and the Chinese second division – which, until recently, was home to striker Carlo Costly, who has scored 30 goals in 68 matches with the national team but has never fulfilled his potential at club level.

Honduras are, in short, a modest team, inferior in quality to the one that played in the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, but one that is much more united and with a better spirit. The team's goal is to improve from what they did four years ago, when they managed two slim losses to Chile and Spain, then drew with Switzerland in their last game. **WS**

For the record

QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN
ROUND 3, GROUP C

09.06.12	Panama (h)	0-2
13.06.12	Canada (a)	0-0
07.09.12	Cuba (a)	3-0
12.09.12	Cuba (h)	1-0
13.10.12	Panama (a)	0-0
16.10.12	Canada (h)	8-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Honduras	6	3	2	1	12	3	11
Panama	6	3	2	1	6	2	11
Canada	6	3	1	2	6	10	10
Cuba	6	0	1	5	1	10	1

ROUND 4

06.02.13	USA (h)	2-1
22.03.13	Mexico (h)	2-2
27.03.13	Panama (a)	0-2
08.06.13	Costa Rica (a)	0-1
12.06.13	Jamaica (h)	2-0
19.06.13	USA (a)	0-1
07.09.13	Mexico (a)	2-1
11.09.13	Panama (h)	2-2
11.10.13	Costa Rica (h)	1-0
16.10.13	Jamaica (a)	2-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
USA	10	7	1	2	15	8	22
Costa Rica	10	5	3	2	13	7	18
Honduras	10	4	3	3	13	12	15
Mexico	10	2	5	3	7	9	11
Panama	10	1	5	4	10	14	8
Jamaica	10	0	5	5	5	13	5

Players used in qualifiers

SIXTEEN GAMES
Oscar GARCIA (1,252 mins)
FIFTEEN
Victor BERNARDEZ (1,350 mins)
FOURTEEN
Noel VALLADARES (1,260 mins), Emilio IZAGUIRRE (1,128 mins)
THIRTEEN
Maynor FIGUEROA (1,170 mins), Carlo COSTLY (1,095 mins)
TWELVE
Roger ESPINOZA (1,079 mins), Jerry BENGTSON (891 mins), Arnold PERALTA (858 mins)
ELEVEN
Luis GARRIDO (957 mins), Wilson PALACIOS (839 mins)
NINE
Mario MARTINEZ (689 mins)
EIGHT
Jorge CLAROS (408 mins), Juan Carlos GARCIA (386 mins)
SIX
Marvin CHAVEZ (177 mins)
FIVE
Andy NAJAR (263 mins)
FOUR
Georgie WELCOME (142 mins)
THREE
Brayan BECKELES (270 mins), Mauricio SABILLON (270 mins), Roger ROJAS (156 mins), Jerry PALACIOS (89 mins)
TWO
Edder DELGADO (180 mins), Juan MONTES (180 mins), Donis ESCOBER (164 mins), Anthony LOZANO (118 mins), Edgardo ALVAREZ (39 mins)
ONE
Osman CHAVEZ (90 mins), Johnny LEVERON (90 mins), Jose VELASQUEZ (90 mins), Carlos Will MEJIA (63 mins), Kervin JOHNSON (27 mins), Orlin PERALTA (18 mins), David SUAZO (17 mins), Jose MENDOZA (16 mins), Wilmer CRISANTO (12 mins), Carlos DISCUA (7 mins)

SCORERS IN QUALIFIERS
NINE GOALS
Jerry BENGTSON
SEVEN
Carlo COSTLY
TWO
Mario MARTINEZ
ONE
Victor BERNARDEZ, Marvin CHAVEZ, Maynor FIGUEROA, Juan Carlos GARCIA, Oscar GARCIA, Wilson PALACIOS, Roger ROJAS

The coach

Luis Fernando Suarez

A Colombian-born coach who sprang into fame when he took Ecuador to the round of 16 at the 2006 World Cup, where they narrowly lost to England. He's better known for his effective motivational skills than his tactical acumen. Led Atletico Nacional to the Colombian championship in 1999.

Motivator...Suarez

The key players

Steadying influence...Figueroa

Maynor Figueroa

The team's best player at the moment and the only one who has had a good season in England. At 30, he seems to be at his best, while his stability and calm at the heart of the defence will be essential in Brazil.

Never say die...Espinoza

Roger Espinoza

His positional awareness and never-say-die attitude make him irreplaceable for the national team.

Carlo Costly

Underwhelming with almost every club he has played for outside of Honduras, but every time he puts on the national shirt he exceeds expectations. He has scored 30 goals in 68 internationals, including the winning goal against Mexico at the Estadio Azteca.

Way to goal...Costly is a regular scorer in the national team's shirt

The unanswered questions

Will the team stay united?

When they travelled to South Africa 2010 for their first World Cup in 28 years, everything seemed to be perfect. But after two defeats it was revealed that the older and younger players couldn't stand each other. This time the spirits are again running high, but will they remain so if things go wrong?

Will there be a surprise name in the team?

The squad has remained mostly the same throughout the qualifiers, but some players could sneak on to the plane to Brazil. The most likely candidate is Jonathan Mejia, a Spanish-born striker who has been outstanding with second-tier Spanish side Real Jaen.

Call-up hopes...Jonathan Mejia (left)

Will lack of action affect the main players?

Espinoza and Wilson Palacios are often on the subs' bench for their clubs in England, while Najar has only just recently gained a spot at Anderlecht and Costly was playing in the Chinese second division.

Reasons to be cheerful

A decent draw

It could have been a lot worse than France, Switzerland and Ecuador. The Hondurans were the better side in their draw with the Swiss in South Africa 2010, the French have a tendency to implode and Ecuador have not caused problems away from home.

Consistent...Valladares

An experienced backbone to the side

Some players admitted they were star-struck in 2010, but this won't be the case now. The core, including Valladares, Figueroa, Espinoza, Wilson Palacios and Izaguirre, already have World Cup experience.

A solid defence

Valladares is a very consistent goalkeeper, Bernardez and Figueroa have played together for years at the heart of the defence, and Izaguirre is fast and composed down the left.

Reasons to be fearful

Lack of attacking choices

Eight of the 13 goals scored in the final qualifying round were scored by either Costly or Bengtson. What if either is unavailable?

Lack of a true star

Honduras rely on their teamwork, but while their rivals have the likes of Valencia, Benzema or Xhaka, Suarez doesn't have a player who can decide a match by himself.

Age could be a factor

Of the team that played the last qualifier against Jamaica, only two – Najar and Garrido – will be aged under 28 by the time the World Cup starts.

THE QUALIFIERS SPAIN

The holders have more doubts than expected

Qualification was not quite as simple as many people might have assumed. By Sid Lowe

Rearguard action...Spain (in red) needed to get a result against France in Paris after they were held to a draw at home

An injury-time goal by Olivier Giroud at the Vicente Calderon in Madrid and a 79th-minute strike from Teemu Pukki at Estadio El Molinon in Gijon had threatened to complicate Spain's qualification for the 2014 World Cup.

Although, those two games were five months apart, Spain had suffered two consecutive 1-1 draws and they trailed France by two points. Just two wins in four games – against Georgia and Belarus – left them on edge and four days after drawing with Finland they travelled to Paris in desperate need of a victory.

In the end, Pedro's goal clinched a 1-0 win at the Stade de France that took Spain back to the top of their group. Three more wins followed to take them to Brazil – where they will begin their defence of the title against the team they beat in the Final four years ago: Holland.

Spain's qualification campaign did not always have the authority that supporters had got used to, but in Paris they had been recognisably Spain again. As usual, possession stood at the heart of everything they did, acting as a means of protection as well as progression.

If there were few opportunities, control was central. Sergio Busquets and Xabi Alonso – the latter superb away to France – continued together in the centre of midfield. It is the formula on which Spain's historic success has been built, and the world and double European champions will travel to Brazil looking for a unique run of four successive tournaments.

When it comes to getting goals, there were more doubts. The nature of Spain's system makes the centre-forward role a difficult one and, while coach Vicente Del Bosque has tested several options, few seem to have entirely convinced him. That is one of the reasons behind his decision to occasionally, and largely successfully, play with a false nine. Cesc Fabregas is the man most often employed up front in this role, although Pedro the most decisive when it comes to goals – he was Spain's top scorer with four.

When Spain played Belarus in Palma, Del Bosque gave a debut up front to Swansea City's Michu. He was the latest in a long line of forwards: during qualification, David Villa played four games, Alvaro Negredo four, Fernando Torres one, Roberto Soldado one and Michu one. There were three goals for Negredo and one for Soldado. Jordi Alba and Sergio Ramos, both defenders, got a couple each.

At this summer's World Cup it is likely that the starting striker will be Atletico Madrid's Diego Costa, who played his first game for Spain in March, against Italy in Madrid, just seven months after making an international friendly debut for Brazil. WS

For the record

QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN

GROUP I

11.09.12	Georgia (a)	1-0
12.10.12	Belarus (a)	4-0
16.10.12	France (h)	1-1
22.03.13	Finland (h)	1-1
26.03.13	France (a)	1-0
06.09.13	Finland (a)	2-0
11.10.13	Belarus (h)	2-1
15.10.13	Georgia (h)	2-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain	8	6	2	0	14	3	20
France	8	5	2	1	15	6	17
Finland	8	2	3	3	5	9	9
Georgia	8	1	2	5	3	10	5
Belarus	8	1	1	6	7	16	4

Players used in qualifiers

EIGHT GAMES
Sergio RAMOS (699 mins), Andres INIESTA (593 mins), PEDRO (562 mins)

SEVEN
Sergio BUSQUETS (597 mins), XAVI (591 mins), Cesc FABREGAS (435 mins)

SIX
Alvaro ARBELOA (490 mins)

FIVE
Jordi ALBA (450 mins), Iker CASILLAS (450 mins), Gerard PIQUE (450 mins), David SILVA (314 mins), Santi CAZORLA (247 mins)

FOUR
Xabi ALONSO (360 mins), David VILLA (196 mins), Alvaro NEGREDO (167 mins)

THREE
Victor VALDES (270 mins), Jesus NAVAS (154 mins), KOKE (120 mins), Juan MATA (48 mins)

TWO
Nacho MONREAL (135 mins), JUANFRAN (130 mins), Raul ALBIOL (111 mins)

ONE
Alberto MORENO (90 mins), Roberto SOLDADO (90 mins), Mario SUAREZ (90 mins), MICHU (57 mins), Fernando TORRES (16 mins), ISCO (8 mins)

SCORERS IN QUALIFIERS

FOUR GOALS
PEDRO

THREE
Alvaro NEGREDO

TWO
Jordi ALBA, Sergio RAMOS

ONE
Juan MATA, Roberto SOLDADO, XAVI

The coach

Vicente Del Bosque

For a man who once admitted that he did not expect to become a head coach, and instead had anticipated spending his career working in youth development and coaching, Del Bosque has not done too badly. Twice a European Cup winner, he has also led Spain to success in the European Championship and the World Cup.

Huge success...Del Bosque

The key players

Xabi Alonso

For a long time, there were doubts over whether Spain should play with two deep-lying midfielders, but Del Bosque's decision to stick with Busquets and Alonso has been totally vindicated. Few players have the tactical awareness and range of passing Alonso boasts.

Great impact...Fabregas

Leader...Ramos

Sergio Ramos

Scorer of that "Panenka" penalty at Euro 2012 and a real leader within the Spain dressing room. He has 114 caps at the age of just 27 and his central defensive partnership with Pique will be fundamental.

Cesc Fabregas

For a player who has rarely been a guaranteed starter, his impact on Spain's football history has been huge, with winning penalties against Italy in 2008 and Portugal in 2012, and assists for Iniesta in the 2010 Final and Silva in 2012.

Andres Iniesta

The man that Ramos describes as "the enlightened one", he was the scorer of the winning goal in 2012 and universally popular. "When he has the ball, it is like everything else stops," says Fernando Torres.

Universally popular...Iniesta is a favourite of both fans and team-mates

The unanswered questions

Who will play at centre-forward?

Diego Costa may get the nod, but the Brazilian is a controversial character and it remains to be seen how a settled squad might react to his arrival.

Who will play in midfield?

Mata, Cazorla, Fabregas, Silva, Pedro, Isco, Thiago Alcantara, Iniesta, Navas. Spain are inundated with midfielders who would be worthy of a starting place in most teams.

Will there be a surprise late call-up?

If there is, it could be Real Madrid's 21-year-old striker Jese.

Reasons to be cheerful

Track record

As world and double European champions, Spain have good reason to be confident. There may be doubts going into the summer but there often are – and no team has shown such an aptitude for tournament football as Del Bosque's side.

Solid defence

Including Finals, Spain have now played 10 consecutive knockout games – from Euro 2008 to World Cup 2010 and Euro 2012 – without conceding a single goal.

Thiago Alcantara

He may have found his way blocked at Barcelona, but at Bayern Munich he is getting better and better, and he offers something a little different.

Different...with more playing time in Munich, Thiago Alcantara is making his mark

Reasons to be fearful

The draw

Holland and Chile will be far from easy opponents, and if Spain don't manage to win their group, it's extremely likely that it will be tournament hosts and favourites Brazil who await them in the next round.

Xavi

He is the ideologue behind the greatest Spain team in history, but time waits for no man and fatigue may be a factor. Does the midfielder have another great tournament in him?

Casillas' lack of games

Spain captain and keeper could go to Brazil without playing a single league game this season.

On the bench...Real Madrid's Casillas

World Soccer's GREAT TEAMS

Portugal 1966

Inspired by the great Eusebio, Otto Gloria's team reached the semi-finals of the World Cup in England

Wembley showdown...the Portugal side that was beaten 2-1 in the 1966 World Cup semi-finals by the hosts, England

The 1966 World Cup marked Portugal's tournament debut, with the nucleus of their side made up from the Benfica team that won the European Cup in 1961 and 1962. But while the attack was the sole responsibility of Lisbon's "Eagles", the defence mainly consisted of players from Porto and Sporting.

Under the guidance of coach Otto Gloria and Manuel Da Luz Afonso, who was Benfica's director of sport, Portugal began the finals with two games at Old Trafford, where they saw off Hungary and Bulgaria, 3-0 and 3-1 respectively, before moving on to Goodison Park to confront the World Cup holders Brazil.

Goals from Eusebio (two) and Antonio Simoes were too much for the South Americans, although Portugal revealed a lesser-known physical side of their game as they virtually kicked Pele off the pitch.

In the quarter-finals, Gloria's men reverted to type in an enthralling game against a North Korea team who had beaten Italy in their final group match to progress to the last eight. On course for another shock, the Koreans led 3-0 after 25 minutes, before Eusebio took the game by the scruff of the neck and scored four times in a 5-3 win to set up a semi-final meeting with hosts England.

Two Bobby Charlton goals at Wembley brought the Portuguese adventure to an end, although they returned home with the consolation of a third place play-off win against Lev Yashin's Soviet Union.

While those finals should have heralded the start of an exciting era for such a talented team, the side split up soon after and it would be another 20 years before Portugal would qualify for a World Cup again. WS

THE COACH AND HIS TEAM

Otto Gloria

The Brazilian incorporated ideas from basketball and other sports as he led Benfica to the Portuguese title in 1955 and 1957. After becoming national coach in 1964, further titles followed – in 1968 and 1969 – when he returned to Benfica, who he led to the 1968 European Cup Final. He later took Nigeria to success in the 1980 African Nations Cup before returning to coach Portugal once again in 1982. He resigned a year later and died in 1986, aged 69.

Tactics

Gloria built his teams on organisation and discipline, but also encouraged them to be creative. He played a 4-2-4 system, which was heavily influenced by Flavio Costa, Brazil's coach in the 1950s. The idea was to use six players when attacking and six when defending, with Coluna and Graca performing both tasks. With four forwards, the space in midfield encouraged defenders to start attacks.

THE STARTING XI

Jose Pereira
Goalkeeper
Made his debut in 1965, aged 33, and replaced Joaquim Carvalho after the opening game.

Alberto Festa
Right-back
Quick, attacking defender who was a good crosser of the ball. Played in three games at the tournament.

Alexandre Baptista
Central defender
Skilful player who kept Benfica's Germano out of the team. Qualified as an economist while a player.

Jose Carlos
Central defender
Only played two games at the 1966 World Cup: the semi-final and the third-place play-off.

Hilario
Left-back
Played 40 times for his country, between 1959 and 1971, including all six games at the 1966 finals.

Mario Coluna
Midfielder
National captain who was twice a European Cup winner with Benfica. Died in February (see page 13).

Jaime Graca
Midfielder
A qualified electrician who saved the life of Eusebio from a hot-tub malfunction in 1966.

Jose Augusto
Right-winger
Scored three goals in the 1966 finals. Was assistant coach in their run to the semi-finals at Euro 84.

Eusebio
Forward
Died in January at the age of 71. He was the leading scorer at the 1966 finals with nine goals.

Jose Torres
Forward
A 6ft 3in centre-forward, he went on to coach Portugal at the 1986 World Cup.

Antonio Simoes
Left-winger
Finished his playing career in the USA indoor league and is now assistant coach to Carlos Queiroz with Iran.

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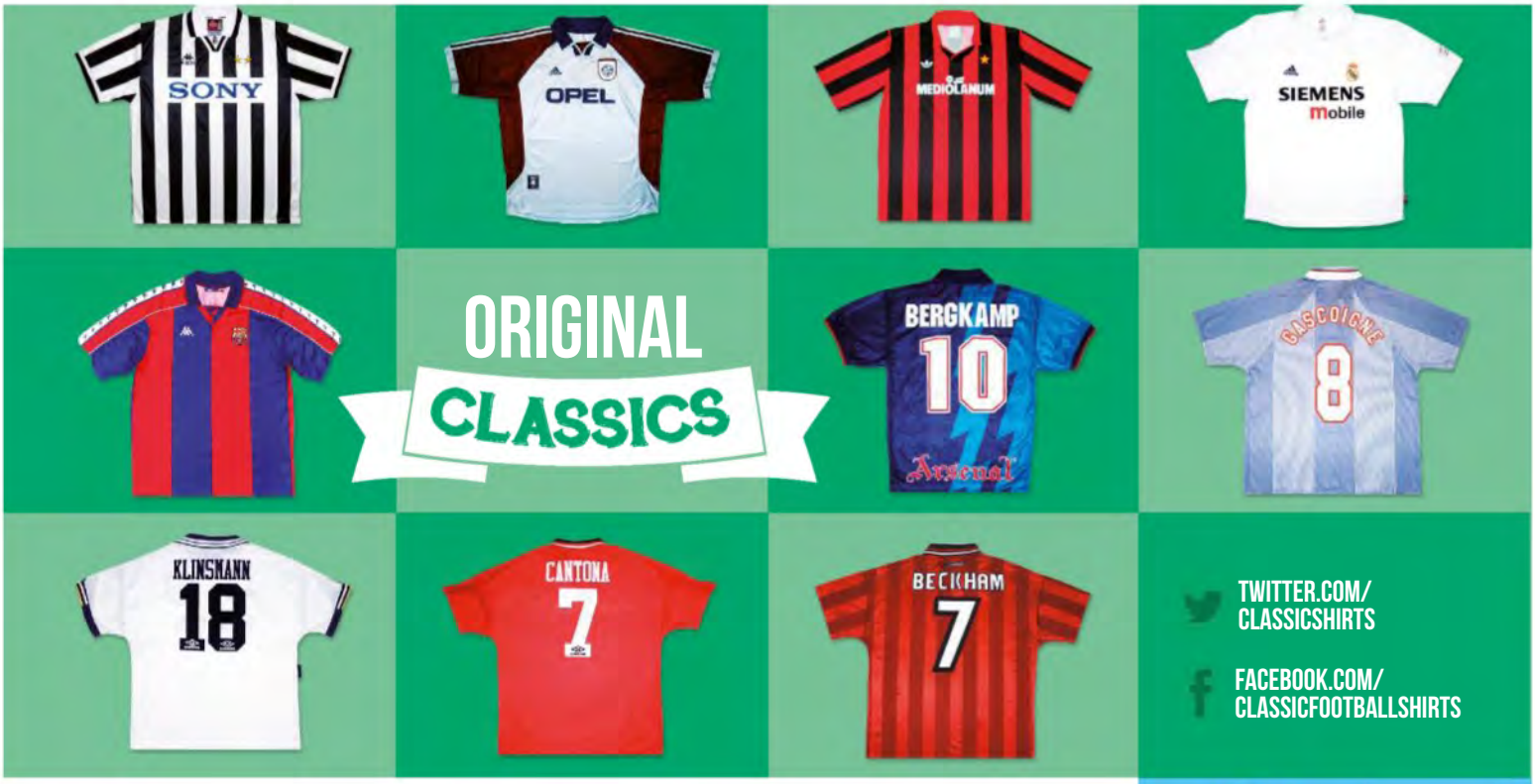

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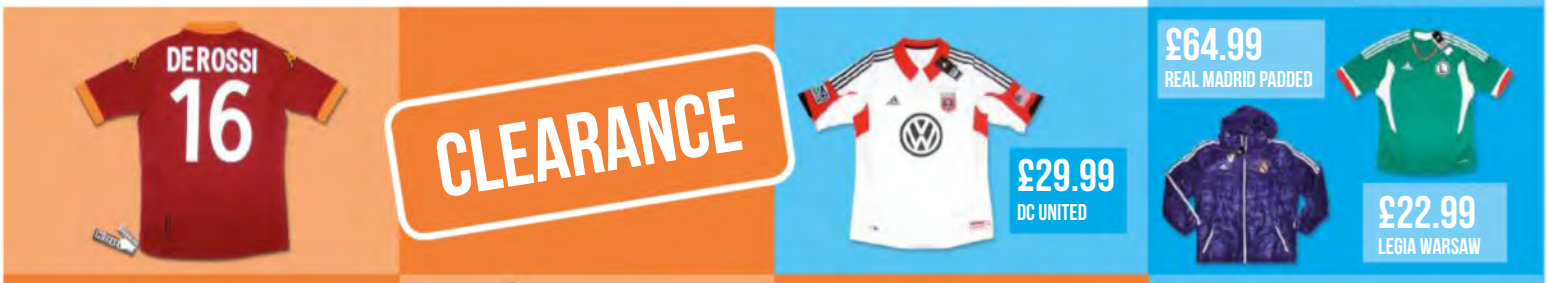

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